



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Youth Work Funding Review:

Phase 3: Summary Report

January 2025



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Metropolitan
University**

**Prifysgol
Metropolitan
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Title: Youth Work Funding Review

Subtitle: Phase 3 Summary Report, March 2025.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents a summary of the research undertaken for phase 3 of the Youth Work Funding Review in Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Government.
- 1.2 The aim of this third and final phase was to: undertake an exploration of the economic and social value of youth work in Wales. The objectives of phase 3 were:
- To identify and define both social and economic impacts of youth work through an exploration of the literature; data collected through Phase 2 of this research; and collection of qualitative data from young people and other stakeholders.
 - To identify which impact areas have existing quantitative data available to allow for the assessment of economic benefits of youth work.
 - To use these sources to undertake an assessment of the economic impacts of youth work in Wales.
 - To gather and present the perspectives of a purposive sample of young people that have engaged in youth work, to enrich the economic and macro benefits with social and individual context and deepen understanding of the complex and over-lapping mechanisms of youth work that this research has encountered.
- 1.3 Phase 3 employed a mixed method approach (quantitative and qualitative) to estimate the economic value of youth work across Wales. The intention was to support the quantitative economic analysis with relevant qualitative contextual evidence from key stakeholders from the youth work sector, including senior leaders and young people.

Report Content

- 1.4 The summary report will: First, outline the research that was undertaken for phase 3. Second, it will present an overview of the qualitative data outcomes including limitations. Third, make recommendations for the Welsh Government and the sector to consider future research that may enable analysis of the economic value of youth work.

2. Research undertaken

Literature Review

- 2.1 A scoping review was conducted on the five social and economic impact areas identified (see section 2.3) to enable identification of existing appropriate research that could be employed within the economic analysis including relevant quantitative data. This also provided the advantage of enabling identification of gaps in knowledge and/or access to existing evidence. The review was also concerned with the tools used to conduct research among young people. The research team created a database to document all the sources reviewed and their relevance to the study's aims.
- 2.2 There were a number of criteria against which the scoping review was undertaken. First, economic impact studies of youth work in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The review of the literature demonstrated that although these are broad areas with different interpretative frameworks, all were able to provide some impact data that could potentially be utilised in an analysis. Within that there is recognition that some of the data is more recent and/or more robust than other data. In total 45 sources were included in the review under three exclusion criteria: relevance of the data, applicability to youth work in Wales and clarity of the data collection method. Specifically, sources were excluded if information was not available on data collection methods or sample sizes or where data did not relate to young people.
- 2.3 From this review, and other indicative data from phase 2, five areas were selected against which to consider the impact of youth work, and the consequent economic benefit provided by the youth work sector. These were Community safety; Education and employment; Community and volunteering; Housing and homelessness and health, Emotional mental health and wellbeing. It was recognised that these areas are not independent of one another but are intrinsically linked. It was further recognised that the wellbeing of young people is a thread that runs through all themes.

Quantitative

- 2.4 An economic evaluation was a key intention for phase 3 of this research. A review was conducted identifying and utilising a broad range of evidence. Welsh-focused studies were prioritised in the review. However, there was not sufficiently robust evidence available to reflect the scope of youth work delivery across Wales. Different techniques were explored to estimate the value of Welsh youth work to the Welsh economy, however due to insufficient data the relationship between youth work and economic outcomes could not be adequately modelled. Both the research team and Welsh Government agreed that it was not appropriate to take the results through to publication.
- 2.5 Based on the above, the research team recommends that, in order to make progress in assessing the economic value of youth work, a robust evidence base needs to be established in Wales. This will require the development of improved monitoring systems for youth work provision to allow for outcomes to be captured and assessed. In addition, examining individual interventions in detail with a specific set of outcomes will begin to build this evidence base and establish estimates for future economic models.

Qualitative

- 2.6 Phase 3 employed a qualitative approach to collecting data in addition to a quantitative economic analysis. Focus groups were the main method of data collection used. The aim of undertaking focus groups was to demonstrate the potential of youth work in the impact areas outlined in the quantitative economic analysis, from a young person's and from a strategic leader's perspective. In addition to focus groups, publicly available data on the youth work projects represented in the research was utilised alongside information provided by youth work project leaders. This was captured to enable each focus group to be contextualised and help to provide a narrative overview of the youth work project area being explored.

Focus Groups Sample

- 2.7 A stakeholder purposeful sampling strategy was used for all the qualitative focus groups with the young people and with the strategic leads for youth work. The focus group data was not intended to be representative of all young people or stakeholders across Wales, they provided examples of contextual and key stakeholder perspectives, which could not be captured by considering monetary values alone (Dopp, et al. 2019). The aim and scope of the study did not lend itself to wider research across Wales, however it is recognised that a broader study would be of value to youth work in Wales (See sections, 3.4 Limitations and 4. Recommendations).
- 2.8 Table 1 outlines the young people's focus group sample. Five different youth work projects were identified, with each project representing one impact area as its key priority (see Table 1). Each focus group therefore explored one impact area with young people. However, it was recognised that youth work has a holistic approach to working with young people, thus isolating one impact area would not be possible and that the wider benefits of the projects would likely be identified (see section 3).
- 2.9 Three focus groups were undertaken with strategic decision makers developing and implementing youth work in Wales, one with chief executives of the voluntary youth work sector (VYWS) and two with local authority's strategic leaders for youth work, namely principal youth officers (PYO) (Table 2 below).

Focus Group Data Analysis

2.10 For the focus group data, qualitative thematic analysis was used. Two approaches were adopted and adapted in the study:

- A thematic analysis six step approach (Braun and Clarke 2023)
- A direct approach to analysis and thematic review (Greenwood, et.al. 2017; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

Table 1: Focus groups with young people

| Benefit area | Focus Group Youth work provision | Focus group participant numbers |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Community safety | National voluntary youth work sector project specialising in diverting young people away from the criminal justice system | 9 Age range 16-26 ¹ |
| 2. Education & employment | Local authority education engagement and reintegration project | 7 Age range 12-13 |
| 3. Community involvement & volunteering | Local voluntary, youth work sector centre, open access “drop-in” | 5 Age range 12-15 |
| 4. Homelessness | A local authority youth service homelessness project | 4 Age range 18-25 |
| 5. Health, emotional mental health and wellbeing | Local authority emotional health and wellbeing project | 6 Age range 14-18 |

Table 2: Focus groups with strategic decision makers

| Focus Group | Focus Group numbers |
|--|--|
| 1 x voluntary youth work sector chief executives | 14 organisations in total: 6 local and 8 national |
| 2 x local authority strategic leads | 1x Focus Group =11 1x Focus Group=10 21 in total |

¹ The young people in this focus group were volunteers and paid peer researchers of the project, they were therefore both participants and team members of the project.

3. Qualitative Outcomes

3.1 Section 2.4-2.5 outlines the quantitative approach adopted in phase 3 and the limitations. A summary of the outcomes from the qualitative data are presented below, including limitations.

3.2 The five focus groups undertaken with young people and the three with strategic decision makers (see Tables 1 & 2) demonstrate how youth work positively contributes to the economic impact areas identified. The focus groups all provided evidence that these impact areas are interlinked and require a multidimensional approach, illustrating how youth work can holistically support young people across the economic impact areas identified.

3.3 A summary of the key findings from the focus groups are outlined here, further in-depth accounts (vignettes) of the focus groups can be found in the appendix.

i. Impact area, Community safety:

This focus group illustrated the work of a national voluntary sector youth work organisation delivering a project aimed at directing young people away from the criminal justice system. The focus group highlighted that, as well as tackling youth violence and anti-social behaviour the project has had a positive impact on the well-being of the young people. Notably, the focus group findings demonstrated that this project has led to the young people feeling a strong sense of purpose and belonging and feeling accepted regardless of ethnicity or background.

The focus group with the voluntary youth work chief executives (VYWCE) and local authority strategic leads (LASL) for the youth service highlighted that community safety is a multifaceted concept and can encompass many different perspectives and definitions. Youth work was viewed as providing a number of impacts in this area including offering support and safe spaces for young people (particularly in relation to community-based youth work); offering diversionary activities and it was viewed as helping to address anti-social behaviour and county lines issues.

ii. Impact area, Education and employment:

The local authority education engagement and reintegration project provided alternatives to exclusion from school.

The key findings from this focus group demonstrated that the ability of youth workers to establish effective relationships with the young people was the key to positively engaging them. In addition, the findings revealed that the project provided positive experiences of education, which enabled young people to see opportunities available to them in the future.

This focus group also demonstrated how supporting young people through a youth work approach to positively re-engage with education can lead to other positive impacts; in this case the project also contributed to crime prevention and reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.

The focus groups with the voluntary youth work chief executives (VYWCE) and local authority strategic leads (LASL) for the youth service discussed the importance of developing confidence and social skills through youth work to help young people engage in education and training opportunities.

iii. Impact area, Community involvement and volunteering:

Findings from the voluntary sector, open access centre focus group, suggest that substantial and varied volunteering opportunities were provided for young people. These opportunities allowed young people to be more active in their community, to try new things and make new friends; leading to the development of personal/ social skills, employability and life skills and, a greater connection to their local community.

The focus group with the voluntary youth work chief executives (VYWCE) and local authority strategic leads (LASL) for the youth services viewed community involvement and volunteering as

important particularly within the voluntary sector, to help young people integrate in their communities.

iv. Homelessness:

Evidence from this focus group suggest the local authority holistic youth work approach to homelessness is keeping young people safe and off the streets though empowering young people to be able to take control of their lives and live independently, and this wrap around service leads to greater levels of wellbeing.

The key findings from this focus group demonstrated the benefits of a youth work approach that encompasses the holistic needs of the young person including supporting with the complexities of applying and maintaining housing, building positive trusting relationships, providing advocacy and developing skills necessary for empowerment and self-sufficiency.

Specifically, the positive trusted relationships the young people described having with their youth workers was a key factor in the project. Enabling young people to have a voice and influence decision making was also highlighted by the young people as being important to them.

The focus group with the voluntary youth work chief executives (VYWCE) and local authority strategic leads (LASL) for the youth service identified that youth work is playing an important role in identifying young people at risk of homelessness, and providing the independent living skills for young people was viewed as going hand in hand with a youth works approach.

v. Impact area, Health, emotional mental health and wellbeing:

The focus group with a local authority emotional health and wellbeing service, shows how youth work initiatives can respond to young people's needs and offer them appropriate support.

The key findings from this focus group demonstrated that youth work has provided networks of support for young people and given them 'someone to talk to'. They described how youth work support has built their confidence and encouraged their active participation and engagement in activities promoting improved emotional health and wellbeing. Young people felt that this support reduced levels of social isolation, anxiety, aggression and violence. There was also a recognition that the project helped young people to develop increased knowledge and skills.

The focus group with the voluntary youth work chief executives (VYWCE) and local authority strategic leads (LASL) for the youth service discussed that emotional mental health and wellbeing is an increasing area of work that youth work is involved in. It was noted by both the voluntary and local authority run youth services that working in partnership with other organisations, including the health service, was key to being able to provide appropriate support for young people. One voluntary youth work organisation described their experiences of how a youth work approach can make a positive contribution to not just short term but longer-term outcomes for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

vi. Holistic nature of youthwork:

It is evident from the focus groups undertaken with young people that the five impact areas can be seen to have shared outcomes and are interlinked. This is viewed as the result of the holistic nature of a youth work approach and its underpinning principles and purposes, namely,

“...to enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational

development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential” (NOC YW, 2019).

The strategic leads for youth work in Wales focus groups emphasised that it is hard to separate the impact youth work has within the five impact areas because of the underpinning principles and purposes of youth work and its approach to supporting young people holistically.

Limitations of qualitative data

3.4 The limitations of the qualitative research undertaking in this study were as follows:

- i. The qualitative focus group data demonstrates a small sample size, and are not representative of youth work across Wales, or of young people. It was, however, not the aim of the focus group to be representative, the aim was to illustrate and provide contextual data for the economic analysis and show the potential of youth work.
- ii. Combining a qualitative and quantitative research approach with different methods of analysis highlights the challenges from a qualitative perspective of isolating variables or impacts in a real world setting within a complex social context. The literature review and the qualitative focus groups demonstrate that the five economic impact areas have shared outcomes and are interlinked
- iii. The strategic leads focus group with the VYWSO was large, with 14 participants. A focus group should ideally have between 8-10 participants, to ensure all members can have a voice. A pragmatic and ethical approach was however adopted to capture as many views as possible with a group of key stakeholders who were able to provide their valuable time to a focus group meeting. To mitigate the size of the groups, all participants were forwarded a list of the questions used and were asked to follow up with any further points, post the meeting; several participants forwarded further information.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 **Recommendation 1:** We recommend that the Welsh Government and other partners consider undertaking a broader qualitative study that represents youth work in Wales, to enable the holistic and cross cutting approach to youth work identified in the research to be evidenced further.
- 4.2 **Recommendation 2:** We recommend that the Welsh Government and other partners consider how data on young people in Wales is collected in a systematic way to ensure that appropriate conclusions can be drawn as to economic and social value of youth work in Wales.
- 4.3 **Recommendation 3:** We recommend that the Welsh Government and other partners consider how data collection undertaken by the youth work sector in Wales is standardised across Wales, to enable appropriate comparisons to be made across local authority areas. Training and/or support should be considered to undertake this work in a consistent way.

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7. Appendix: Qualitative Focus Group Vignettes

Focus group vignettes, young people

Five different youth work projects were identified for undertaking focus groups with young people, each project representing as its key priority one economic impact area identified as the focus for this study:

1. Community safety
2. Education and employment
3. Community involvement and volunteering
4. Homelessness
5. Health, emotional mental health and wellbeing

The aim of the focus groups, as noted in the methodology section, was to illustrate the potential of youth work in relation to the economic impact areas identified. They were not intended to be representative; they do provide good practice examples of how youth work can support and enable positive outcomes for young people.

1. Community safety

Focus

Benefits of youth work in supporting community safety

Introduction

The focus group illustrates the evidence from a focus group with nine young people from a national voluntary sector youth project. The young people's perspectives are included alongside evidence from published data on young people's wellbeing and emotional health. It outlines examples of the benefits of a youth work approach in supporting young people holistically by providing access to opportunities for personal, social, and educational support with a project that is committed to "advancing the right to safety, equality, and justice for all young people". Working across Wales to champion a "Wales without violence" collaborating with thousands of young people and professionals to create a framework designed to create "systemic change and give young people a voice in decision-making".

Contexts

This voluntary sector youth organisation works "restoratively through media and creative approaches, delivering localised solutions that engage and empower individuals with the skills and self-esteem to succeed and make a positive contribution to Welsh society". The organisation is responsible for the project management and coordination of an all-Wales programme of delivery that is comprised of "a network of young people dedicated to creating

positive change in their communities through innovative research and proactive action” who are committed to embedding a “culture of violence prevention through a shared, whole-society approach”. Operating across Wales the project’s mission is to “empower young people, especially underrepresented groups who have experienced the criminal justice system and/or been looked after, by giving them a voice and supporting them in developing their passions and talents”. The programme is “geared towards addressing pressing societal issues such as youth violence and its underlying drivers, including mental health, sexuality, race, and gender.” The young people who comprise the project staff team engage in a range of research to “spotlight young people’s experiences of violence and maltreatment, before leveraging their findings to devise actionable solutions that help shape policy, programs, and initiatives aimed at making our communities healthier and safer”. Changemakers “collaborate with peer researchers who have an intimate understanding of the challenges and issues faced by their communities. This collaboration allows them to ensure that the projects and initiatives developed are relevant, impactful, and sustainable with the aim of driving social action and promoting positive change in Wales”. The ethos of the project “ promotes holistic, whole-system thinking to address a complex, societal issues, focuses on structural inequality alongside promoting healthy relationships and nonviolent societal norms, as well as building individuals’ resilience and responding to their needs, critically questioning and harnessing research to understand the causes of violence and effective strategies for violence prevention...rooted in the lived experiences of children and young people, working alongside them to create the solutions”

Themes

Nine young people aged from 16-26* identified the key benefits for them of engaging with youth work to support them with their personal development but also to directly impact the lived experience of young people across Wales on local, national operational and systemic levels. The young people in this focus group were volunteers and paid peer researchers, they are therefore both participants and team members of the project

Respect, safety and belonging

For all the young people being involved with this voluntary sector youth work violence prevention and positive social action programme a key theme was a deep sense of respect and belonging:

YP2: “ I left education and I came to [Name].....I've been on [the project] now for was, like, 3 years, yeah, three years. When I first started, like, my anxiety was always like off the rails and things like that, I wouldn't speak to adults, I wouldn't speak to other people my own age you know, I'd put my hand up to ask to go for a toilet at work. And now I don't shut up....I think something about like joining [the project] is you're surrounded with people who do youth work and work with young people and have that understanding of engagement. So...even though I was only 18 at the time when I started, I wasn't spoken down to like a child by the people who were like, you know, almost in their 30s and things like that. I was spoken to as an equal....in school you have that sort of power dynamic where you're spoken down to, but in that work setting as a young person speaking to these adults who were on like the same balance, that helped me gain my confidence from there... but it's also like made me be able to, like empower myself as well as other people because I don't just focus on myself. I focus on other people within my room as well. So I'm able to actually like empower more

people than just myself. And then that's what I've learned along the way. From my experience there.

YP3: “ think joining [organisation name] just as a [job role] I've never felt a part of like a genuine family, like a really nice loving working environment like I've worked in children's charity shops and nobody has treated me with such like, Oh yeah, of course, . You're like, you know, you're part of the group. I've never felt like I've been part of, like, a group.....”

YP6: “I was always very isolated within myself. So again, just joining [organisation name] and actually meeting people and knowing that there are actually people out there that do enjoy the things that you do and there are people out there who also make you feel like it's OK to be yourself...I've never seen the team treat anybody differently because of the way they look or the way that they talk or the things that they like or different things like that. So, I like the how the team really makes people feel safe and confident and can be themselves and they don't isolate people”.

Inclusion, diversity, and equity

It was evident throughout the focus group that diversity and inclusion were central to project delivery. The diverse nature of the staff team supported empathetic and inclusive engagement of young people in a broad range of settings across Wales and was recognised in “multiple awards “. Young people reported that:

YP4: “I would like to add as well, that I joined in the end in November. had, like already, like expectations of what to expect because before, like I already knew, like I had like expectations of that people are going to like see me as, oh, Muslim, they're going to ask, oh, like, what's your name where you're from? like, they would just see a stereotype of me rather than seeing who I am but that expectation was blown out the window, and they just saw me as who I am....and then I was like, whoa and they didn't have any of these preconceived notions of youand I was, I was so shocked I literally could of cried because, like, what the hell..... The stories of other people, the experience of this year honestly broadened my horizons and made me like aware of what other people experience which like, never knew that so many people got stopped and searched,...people telling me in these interviews and stuff about sexual assault and it was, honestly, it was heartbreaking to hear, it broadens your horizon because this is what other people go through, gives you sympathy and like, it makes you more empathetic towards them.”

YP3: “I've never felt like I've been part of, like, a group who give real-world, real-life experiences, like before this, I'd never even been to a pride event. So, I mean, I've been given, like, so many amazing opportunities. I've met so many amazing people and learnt so many different perspectives that I never would have learned beforehand if I had not joined with [organisation name]..... this is a place that celebrates diversity and makes people feel safe to talk about their problems. and gain different perspectives from people who come from all types of backgrounds, cultures, feel different things, believe in different things and yeah, just celebrates that diversity.”

YP9: "...they've been able to like to bring more young people forward when they share their experiences and their voices. We've got so many young people...to identify you know, within, like, well, every gender box and every kind of sexuality, we've got everybody who's like coming forward and talking about the experience because they feel that they're being seen because there are people on the team who bring them in and allow them to be themselves".

YP2: "And I think having such a diverse, cast of characters that's the best way I can describe being in work. Everyone is very unique in a good way, it's I think it's very good and it's confidence boosting for us as employees, as workers as peer researchers as [organisational role] but I think it's also inspiring to the young people who come to us or we go to them because they see that we have made an effort to include everyone in our workforce".

Education & Training

A broad range of accredited training and continuing professional development was built into the project design, management and development, ensuring that young people with often challenging experiences of formal education could benefit from "a second chance" [YP 2]:

YP1: "I struggled a lot in school as well. I left mainstream education in year 10.... it wasn't just working, it wasn't because I was being bullied or anything like that, it was purely just mainstream education, the system itself did not work and it got to the point where it was life or death, if I didn't leave. I wish they did something sooner, 'cause, it would have saved a lot of hassle and issues, but according to them they couldn't. I didn't have like the correct grades like college and stuff due to like my mental health, and I actually came to [project name] for my education, before I started working here, so I was a student here for like a year.... they give you a second opportunity, actually starting fresh as well because you've had, like, I failed my GCSEs so I can't get into the course that I wanted to do, but [organisation name] offered me like a BTEC level to actually start that path into then the next phase of my life that I wanted to actually do so given what I found, it was giving young people a sort of second chance to actually get their lives back on track.."

YP3: "it's given me such a whole new sense of purpose, a whole new sense of life and...so many, so many of my friends have been like, wow, what you are doing is amazing and I just I can't even describe how influential joining this group has been just to my own mental state as well, because I thought I'd never felt like I had a proper sense of purpose. I mean, I did a degree that I hated and I never felt I was even a part of my university and I'd never felt like I was actually a part of the kind of like the community, and as soon as I joined [organisation name] I felt like OK, now I feel like this is where I should be. This is like, you know, I can make this into like a home. I can make this into a place where I can stay. "

YP9: "it's not just progression in terms of the professional development, it's just the overall development as a person, like [name] said that she cried because she's learning so much about herself. That's like, that's amazing., coming to work allowed to have that kind of space".

YP7: [everyone has] “the opportunity to get trained in what we did, suicide awareness training, we’ve done first aid training. Then there will be cultural competency training which is like looking deeper into privilege and race.... to be safe online and like how to make sure young people aren’t being exploited online and things like that. There’s also digital youth work, so how to be safe online and again this is based on the platforms like how young people can relate to those things we’ve also done. There’s been so many different forms of training and yeah, we keep updating everything”

Young people’s voice and empowerment

Ensuring young people have a voice was at the core of the project and clear from the young people’s perspective who are all actively engaging young people across Wales in order to create positive social changes and hold leaders to account as described by one participant who stated:

YP9: “we’ve got one young person in this room who has challenged a very high standing person in position in a board meeting it was [YP name] who pointed out loads of points that were wrong with the governance and how young people were being mistreated... which is like massive for 17 year olds to sit there and say.....this is what you’re not doing. That’s huge for somebody who, like, runs like a, you know, an organisation [to be challenged] they’re like, oh, we are doing this and they couldn’t actually back it up..... we created this strategy guide for professionals, so some police use that, youth workers, organisations, teachers and it’s literally 19 strategies on actually how to engage with young people. It goes all the way from, your first meeting with them all the way to your last.....and there’s different ways of to engage and the things that you know like young people nowadays know a lot more than you would actually think that they would know”.

YP7: “two young people started as [team members] way back at the beginning of beginning of time, it feels like, but like they were there from like the start, they saw that progression and they were like I want to do this and now they’re coming in like I’ve got this, like they’ve been able to like bring more young people forward when they share their experiences and their voices. We’ve got so many young people.... but they’ve allowed other young people to kind of have that space. We’ve added into young people who are on who have got autism and they don’t speak. We’ve had an interview with a young person who was nonverbal and [they] spoke for an hour because [they] felt comfortable, to and I think that’s just amazing. “

Violence reduction

One of the main strands of work is violence prevention supported through the development

YP9: ” On the initial phase of [project name] we created the framework and just because we made that and we have it as a book and we’ve handed it out like all across Walesevery sort of region of Wales. Now we’re looking at like, oh, [locality] without violence, [locality] without violence, [locality] without violence.....so it was co-produced between young people and professionals, now that’s across like all the different regions of Wales, all 22 and organisations who work with young people and young people in

violence and some youth centres, youth clubs have it as well, they have access to this framework now...you understand what the young people are going through you can actually understand what they are seeing, how they're feeling, be able to work with them and actually engage and actually make a difference for the young people's lives and how they can actually help impact their like areas and communities and Wales as a whole".

YP2: " It's mind blowing that there's not enough resources out there that young people can go to, and if you do see them collectively together, I mean, we've been in conversations with professionals and young people with all on the same page because we all know that people stereotype young people who are out and about because it looks like they're causing trouble when they're not. They're just out there doing something because there's nowhere else for them to go and the thing is, I think this role as well is so eye opening because naturally we'd all go out and hang out with our friends..... then you've got to think how many of those young people walk around town, probably can't go home until like 11:00 o'clock tonight, or how many of them are out in town, you know, eating food with their friends in the street because that's the only meal they're going to have tonight. It's really eye opening when you see it because we go to youth groups every week to like, host them or work in them and that's probably sometimes where the most of them will talk. The only time they can be themselves.... but there's still no money in terms of communities and the community centres and what's going on because, well, there is no money and like I said, we've done the work as well, we can see that in the last 10 years what's happened across over where violence has gone up, when the youth resources have gone down".

Concluding thoughts

From the young people's perspectives youth work offered them several positive options that enabled them to develop holistically. Projects such as these focussed on reducing youth violence impact every aspect of personal social and emotional development with youth work relationships underpinning positive change. One focus group participant stating:

YP9: "in terms of the interviews and working with young people, it's really evident that the other people we've been speaking to we in the last six weeks we've worked with over 90 young people more than half said that youth workers, are the people, they feel safe with. I think that just shows like what how the youth work model of Wales is working in comparison to other places because they are although we obviously all know in the last 10 years, youth centres have deeply disrupted them, violence has increased but when you look at the people who are involved in these youth clubs, I mean we've been going to [name] youth group, we've been going into...We've been going to the ones in [place] like [youth project], an LGBT youth group and we're in [place] where you go to these places, you look, you look at the groups that are this is the only place that [young people] go to and it's because of the youth workers that are there...because they feel safe, they've got friends there. So, I think in terms of how youth work in Wales works, I think it is working but I think there's obviously there's lack of like funding and things".

Education and employment

Focus

This focus group were invited to reflect on the benefits of youth work in supporting the engagement and retention of young people identified, through school referrals and the authority's early identification tool as being potentially vulnerable to becoming NEET. It is about improving employability, reducing risk of associated relative poverty, and supporting social inclusion for at risk young people following the ending of their formal education.

Introduction

The focus group illustrates the evidence from a focus group with seven young people from a local authority alternative education and reintegration project. The young people's perspectives are included alongside evidence from project reports and published data on young people not in education, employment, or training. It outlines an example of the benefits of a youth work approach in supporting young people to be at reduced risk of becoming NEET by offering tailored support to participants enabling them to "reduce the risk of permanent exclusion, reintegrate into mainstream education provision, increase engagement and attendance". The project works holistically to provide access to personal, social, and educational skill development, mentoring and empowerment to support young people to become "confident, resilient and optimistic for the future, better able to manage interpersonal relationships".

Context

A youth work project that aims to reduce the number of those who are most at risk of becoming NEET 'supporting young people to take greater control of their lives and successfully engage in the community and reach their full potential'.

The project offers provision two days a week which includes a range of educational workshops on topics that include managing behaviour, effective communication, and teamwork alongside educational visits and activities designed to empower young people, helping them "access information, gain accreditations, develop skills, knowledge, and aspirations". The programme is designed to help young people identify and break down barriers to engagement, identify and resist negative influences and access a range of positive activities. In addition, the young people receive tailored support to identify priority areas of work, develop individual learning plans, identify goals, and personal action plans. The project also develops accessible profiles for each of the young people to educate key stakeholders and partners on triggers, strategies and appropriate coping techniques for the individual with wrap-around support provided by youth service staff during evenings, weekends, and school holidays.

Themes

Seven young people aged 12-13 identified the key benefits for them of engaging with youth work to support them to remain engaged with education and to reduce their risk of exclusion.

Establishing trust and influence through youth work relationships

The importance of the non-judgmental, trusting and well boundaried relationships the young people had with the youth workers was identified by the young people as a critical factor to

their engagement and to accepting supportive challenge, that predicated significant behaviour change. The young people stated:

YP 1: *"...being able to talk to them (youth workers) helps you learn that you are definitely not on your own.... they actually want to help us."*

YP 5: *"...I can tell him every single thing....if you tell (X) something secret he won't say nothin....if you tell the teacher they do everything in their power to make you feel bad about what you done but they won't let you talk . But when you are with (X) he lets you really talk to him"*

YP 2: *"...they (youth workers) will shout at you if you are really playing up but they like understand us more than anything..... School's just stressful... teachers are W***** these are not. These teacher things (youth workers) like are tidy like".*

YP 4: *[the youth workers] "tached me how to learn like how fighting and being horrible to someone back is not the way to go its all about being nice to them and respect them but like if someone does try to be horrible just try and leave it there, this learnt me to agree with teachers an tha"*

YP 6: *"...this ain't school they ain't teachers because they treat you right like even tho I got anger issues and disabilities and I can't be like perfect as the other kids and I can't always keep up it's like it's not affecting how they tech you. Even though if you, naughty an that and it can get you stressed an that but they more calmer about it like these (youth workers) don't scream at you"*

The trust extended to the group as well as the team of youth workers and helped establish pro social networks independent of the programme with one young person describing how *"I'm friends with everyone, we (young people) have a snapchat and message each other in the mornings to get each other up and that"* (YP 7).

Impact on criminal behaviour

For many of the young people the youth work support and intervention resulted in a significant improvement in consequential thinking and aligned reduction of anti-social and risk-taking behaviours which impacted them individually and community safety and crime in their respective communities. The young people stated that:

YP 1: *"I used to get in police chases all the time but then I stopped bothering with them (people in community who get into trouble with Police). He (youth worker) tells me not to do bad things and I listen to him. At the end of the day think of us yeah, we could still be out doing naughty s**** like robbing cars an I was tempted on doing couple bikes but like he's (youth worker) my influencer".*

YP 3: *“with this it’s making me pipe down quite a lot – everyone in here has done something wrong and when they come in here, they realised now they wanna be different”*

YP 2: *“not that long ago when I used to be a little s*** this is where they (youth workers) and martial arts helped me..... I can stay out of trouble now”*

YP 4: [youth worker]“...keeps us out of trouble at nights as well. I can go up the van and it keeps me out of trouble.”

YP 6: *“The first time I was coming here I be looking like a proper stoner man wouldn’t take my hood down, now yeah I go into streets t-shirt shorts no hood no nothin I can finally put my hood down now I can walk around however I want (because no longer in trouble in community). They (youth workers) will bring me up on stuff I used to do. You have gotta be honest, have to be like yeah, the end of the day people (in community) will be like you haven’t changed, but they don’t know you better than you know yourself”.*

YP 7: *“I don’t wanna be in trouble no more. I’m a good boy now. I’m trying to get back to full time school stopped being a d***** in the community running around pinging cars, pinging houses, booting doors, running from Police, robbing stuff being antisocial. I don’t act nowhere badly anymore”*

Improved attendance and reintegration

Most of the young people identified that being involved with the youth service had enabled them to access support that significantly improved attendance and helped to facilitate reintegration and the potential return to full time school stating:

YP 4: [before starting the programme] *“...beginning of year eight I like to do like rugby and that but I weren’t allowed to do rugby, I couldn’t, I wanted to but they (the school) wouldn’t let me because of my behaviour. Now I’m allowed to do rugby, I’m allowed in school trips and that and it’s just showed me I’ve improved a lot. I can do whatever activities I want in school and I’m back in school full time now...”*

YP 2: *“School still does my head in, but I come here... I haven’t been to school this week not sure about next week but since I been here (youth project) I’ve not missed any days at all”.*

Educational opportunities

The young people engage with a range of educational activities that broaden their horizons, support the young people to develop a range of skills and knowledge and build a sense of achievement and mastery that clearly influenced the young people who stated:

YP 1 *"...they keep pushing you to get the best quality work out of you"*

YP 4 *"The projects that we do and that will help us in the future, when we did the motorbikes and mechanics and stuff and when we did the art like it helped us learn we can build stuff and do stuff and learn how to use the grips and other tools".*

YP 2: *"We went down to college and looked at nice cars, looked at it an then they took us into workshops where they fix bikes an we went to take a wheel off ...it was class..."*

YP 3 *"...we made a phone holder that I still use to this day, and I've got my plaque hanging on my wall".*

YP 5: *"...it needs to be longer (the project) cos if it was longer can have more benefit and more fun."*

YP 6: *"...positive futures in it positive futures!"*

Concluding thoughts

From the young people's perspectives, it was apparent that youth work methodologies rooted in discursive interactions offered them a meaningful alternative to exclusion from school, for several, supporting them to address their escalating involvement with the criminal justice system. Through a holistic person-centred approach to reengagement with education and impactful personal, social and emotional education one young person noted that,

YP 2 *"It's changed how I think about stuff, you realise like they (youth workers) are genuinely trying to help you and keep you out of s*** like, the stuff they say like, you tell them something and they say you shouldn't be doing that and you tell them you done something stupid and they will like talk knowledge into you. Before this I was getting into trouble and being a little s*** and then I'd say two months after being in this (youth project) I was realising like I don't wanna have that type of life no more".*

At the end of the focus group the young people were leaving and discussing an end of term activity stating to the youth worker *"...what shall we do, can we talk about this after we go for food"* (YP 1) a powerful illustration that discussion, respect, and trust are fundamental pillars of the project's success.

Community involvement and volunteering

Focus

Benefits of youth work in supporting engagement in community activity and volunteering.

Introduction

The focus group illustrates the evidence from five young people from a voluntary sector open access 'drop in' youth project. The young people's perspectives were obtained through using participatory methods, additional evidence is taken from published data on the project and discussion with the centre's manager. It outlines an example of the benefits of a youth work approach in supporting young people to engage in volunteering and community activity.

Context

The youth centre is based in a Welsh town, it is open five days a week, and works with young people aged 8-25. It is an open access centre where young people can drop in voluntarily, in addition it runs several funded projects with young people, such as: *"Digital Literacy, Financial Literacy, Cooking, Nature Hub Garden, Free Meal Friday LGBTQ+ youth group and junior youth group – Transitionz"*. Through all its provision it provides opportunities for young people to engage in volunteering both within the centre and within their local community. The youth centre promotes opportunities for young people to develop new skills and gain a sense of empowerment through engagement, as well as linking the young people to their local community. Three of its goals include community engagement and volunteering:

"Credibility and Communication

Giving young people a voice and credibility within the wider community".

"Participation and Inclusion

Enabling all young people to participate fully in their community".

"Fundraising

We build strong relationships with funders by maintaining a good track record, involving young people in community fundraising efforts, and actively seeking out new fundraising opportunities".

The centre manager noted that:

"...over 500 people have engaged in various projects at the youth centre in the last year with at least a third having engaged in volunteering activity..."

While taking part in volunteering activities, young people collect 'Time Credits' for volunteering within [name of youth project] and in the community. For each hour of volunteering, young people receive a time credit, which once built up can then be used for trips and activities with [with name of project or across name of county], Wales and the UK for activities such as bowling, the leisure centre, and theatre.

Examples of activities young people engage in through the centre across their many projects include: a youth forum, litter-picking, creating and maintaining a community edible garden, cleaning opportunities at the centre, gardening at the centre and at a local allotment, working in the centre Café, cooking, beach cleans volunteering at other local organisations, e.g. the local Museum. The skills are viewed as transferable to help support them into adulthood.

The centre manager discussed how important volunteering was for young people in enabling them to feel empowered to take responsibility and earn time credits for their time, it is thus seen as a central part of their youth work provision. The manager also commented on how volunteering made the young people feel part of the team at the youth club and connected in the wider community. They noted that they are developing a volunteer tree that young people can add labels to indicate areas they would like to volunteer in for each session and take responsibility for.

Themes

Opportunities to take part in activities

The young people noted the activities that they had been involved, these included the following:

“Gardening

Litter picking in the town

Helping cooking

Helping shopping

Volunteering at the local museum”

Mowing centre lawn

Cleaning

Fundraising: quizzes, cooking, bake sales

“making 50 pancakes for people

Building new PCs”

One young person noted in relation to their volunteering activity:

YP 1; “I’ve done like a lot of the voluntary stuff...I think it’s just because I’ve been here since the dawn of dinosaurs. So, I’ve done maybe a bit more than everybody else, but I’ve done quite a lot of like the cake sales stuff. I’ve helped run the Cafe from time to time. I’ve done a few events, like four or five of them. Like cooking and then they made like a cafe sort of thing, like people ate in the garden and I helped with a cuisine Curry night. I did that as well...I also did like a 16 plus night. I also started helping making the computers...”

Benefits noted by young people

The young people noted several benefits they gained from engaging in the activities outlined, that illustrate a range of personal, social and life skills, fun and joyful were also very prevalent:

"Making new friends" "I've Gained new friends that are lots older than me"

"I've gained more trust"

"I have new social skills"

"Customer service"

"Accomplishing new things every day"

"Life skills"

"New knowledge"

"Satisfied"

"Confidence"

"Enjoy time credits as I love adventure and fun that I can do with them"

"makes me Happy"

"being able to cook" "new cooking skills"

"Reading"

"Having fun"

"Playing"

"Joyful" "Happy"

One young person noted in relation to the benefits of engaging in volunteering:

YP 1: *"So, when we do the things that involve sort of like money and like customer service, I really like it personally, it helps me with what I'm studying in school. It helps a bit more to have a bit of like an understanding of how to treat a customer from entrance to exit and like some people may end up working in retail or something like you don't know, do you? And I think it just gives you a bit more of a boost to your confidence if you were you know to work at a restaurant, you sort of know how to treat a customer without having to be trained in it, if that makes sense. So yeah.... I think it looks good on your CV if you say that you volunteered at Youth club, 5-6 years or however long I've been doing it..."*

The following quotes further illustrate additional benefits from a young people's perspective:

YP 2: *"Yes, it helped me make friends, so volunteering, being here, volunteering and being active in the Community has given me a chance to make friends..."*

YP 4: *"...I have like 6 times credits once and I went bowling with my mum"*

YP 1: *"Basically what I said before, just skills in general, but then I've got more like in-depth with customer service skills, different techniques, social skills, because sometimes I'm a bit like not so confident talking to people... and then there's cooking skills also when I've been doing some stuff."*

Views on youth work and funding

The purpose and context of the research were discussed in the focus group. This discussion led to the young people raising some important points in relation to youth work funding and the importance of youth work provision for them:

YP 1: *“In my opinion I would say that it is very important to fund youth clubs and the government should, the reasoning behind this is due to the fact that a youth club is a place that young people go to be able to do the things that they might not be able to do elsewhere. Not only that but youth clubs are also a place where people from completely different backgrounds come together to celebrate those differences. In conclusion they deserve money because they help so many young people. People they help with mental health and are incredible at helping many people they also support people that really need help with issues they have at home”.*

YP 2: *“This is good place and fun and I like it!*

YP 3: *“youth work gives kids opportunities that they may never get at home...but some funding only gives certain ages a chance”.*

YP 4: *“need places like this and projects because trips and food are good”..*

YP 5: *“It’s good for youth clubs to be funded because young people get to do opportunities they may never have done before and learn important life skills”.*

Concluding thoughts

From the young people’s perspective, it is clear they were given opportunities to engage in a range of volunteering activities in the youth project and within the community, which provided them with the chance to develop and recognise life skills but also personal and social skills in line with the aim of youth work as outlined in the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work:

The aim of youth work is to enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential (NOS for Youth Work (CL&DS), 2019).

Homelessness

Focus

Benefits of youth work in supporting the prevention of youth homelessness.

Introduction

The focus group illustrates the evidence from a focus group with four young people from a local authority youth service homelessness project. The young people's perspectives are included alongside evidence from published data on the project. It outlines an example of the benefits of a youth work approach in supporting young people holistically through providing access to housing, developing life skills/independent living skills, offering emotional support, and providing opportunities for empowerment.

Context

A youth work project that aims to “support, educate and upskill young people in order to avert homelessness” illustrates the benefits of a youth work approach. The project offers several mechanisms of support to address the multidimensional nature of homelessness:

- The project offers temporary supported accommodation, where 18-25 can develop a range of independent living skills before living on their own.
- The project offers a youth worker ‘floating support’ service to help young people at risk of homelessness to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding to apply for, secure and maintain appropriate accommodation, whilst being an active member of the communities in which they live.
- Independent living skills are provided as well as a virtual learning environment which includes a facility to contact youth workers within the platform should they need any advice guidance or clarity.
- A furniture and equipment loan scheme is also provided by the project.
- Awareness raising activities on homelessness through workshops in Schools, colleges training providers and community groups.

In addition, enabling the empowerment young people is viewed as essential through ensuring young people's voices and lived experiences are listened to by decision-makers and they have an opportunity to inform provision.

Themes

Four young people, two boys and two girls aged 18-25 identified the key benefits for them of engaging with youth work to support them with their homelessness:

Housing/tenancy support

For all the young people being involved with the youth service in this project they identified that it enabled them to have access to supported accommodation and long-term accommodation:

YP 1: *"...when I got kicked out...so for those six months, I was, like, completely on my own. All I had was my friends. And then one of my mates did come up to me and told me to and see the youth service as you can go with them and they can help you out quite a lot, and ever since then I've now lived in supported accommodation..."*

YP 3: *"There's a lot of, well, there's a lot of people trying to get houses and a lot get declined, a lot because other people are getting it. The youth service helps me to find places that I could potentially move and as well helps with booking viewings. I see, like what's available try and apply for everything I can. And they also helped me with forms and with applying for council housing as well."*

They noted it was the additional support from the youth service that helped them gain and remain in accommodation which included: being provided with support for independent living skills, ongoing tenancy support through helping with filling in housing benefit forms and managing bills:

YP 1: *"I had no skills to live independently. I didn't know how to cook, how to do laundry. I didn't know anything... I learned how to live independently here. They taught me well, they told me about, like, how the fuse boxes work. They told me how to cook. They told me how to do laundry, do the ironing. So I learned all my independent living skills here, and they also helped by because, well, I was applying for whatever house I could find."*

YP 2: *"So I was very grateful and ever since I've been living there. Now for nearly 2 and half years. And through that supportive living, I have learned a lot more about tenancies, bills, budgeting money, how to handle myself, you know, when I get my own place. How to manage my bills et cetera? Because we do, we do pay a small fee towards, you know, electricals and stuff. And it's been a massive help..."*

Additional educational and personal and social opportunities noted were:

YP 2 *"Recently I joined. Then I've had loads of opportunities to join like different projects, I've got a session where it's teaching me numeracy skills but also life skills about money"*

YP 1: *"We've. Yeah, I've done so many activities going like going on walks, going to like [Name of outdoor area] and exploring [county] as well. It's been a massive opportunity and it's been amazing to get out there a little bit more and boost my confidence at the same time to go back to college"*

Emotional/mental health support

Emotional support provided by the youth service/youth workers was noted as important, this included mental health support. The young people discussed a number of issues that had affected their mental health which were also viewed as factors leading to their homelessness status. For example, experiences discussed were sexual abuse, domestic abuse and overcrowding:

YP 4: *"Obviously due to everything that has happened. Both recently and like further in the past, I've developed quite few sort of serious mental health problems. And obviously, like they're not qualified for sort of give professional support. But my youth worker is sort of like if I'm not feeling OK mentally, we'll go into town, have a coffee, have a chat. And they've just sort of just sort of support me as best as they can. And obviously signposted me in the right sort of directions to get support if I actually wanted it. Yeah, I mean these guys, they move heaven and earth to support us and I couldn't be more grateful. "*

Youth work relationships

The importance of the ongoing relationships the young people had with a youth worker was discussed by young people one young person noted:

YP 2: *"...act a friend, and a parent, gets me out of bed to go to appointments, get me on training, shows me who to go to for additional help".*

YP 1: *"...mine and [young person's name] support worker she's been probably one of the biggest help I've had through the youth service because she is our main support and even though she might not be able to give us like professional help as such for certain mental health issues, she has been like a backbone for me through every traumatic event that I've had. Like she can you. She might be a little bit of a pain in the bum sometimes because she comes in every day and she's getting us to get up and moving. She has. She was been there for everything and I felt good for a lot, even though she's sometimes annoys me..., but I know that she's looking out for us".*

YP 1: *"It's not just about housing where we are. It's about having that support there. For us, it's about parenting us at the same time. If you get me"....*

YP 2: *"I was very standoffish. I didn't like talking, opening up nothing. None of that. I wasn't open to any of it. It was nice to know that she didn't give up on me. Yeah, and she doesn't. Because they don't. They find ways to connect with you, communicate with you. They figure out your language. And then they get it done and they don't hassle you. They don't judge you. They don't do anything. They just listen. That's what sometimes it's all you need in life".*

YP 3: *"Personally for me, like I, I grew up in a sort of quite old fashioned proud.... family and I was sort of raised like not to talk about my feelings and just sort of get on with it and all that sort of stuff. And so I'm. I'm very sort of closed off. I don't sort of talk about how I feel and stuff like that. Then [Youth workers name] pretty much like he's one of my mates, pretty much like he's sort of worn me down enough that we can just sit down, grab a coffee, have a chat about absolutely anything, and it's quite nice because it doesn't sort of feel like I'm being interrogated sort of thing like it just sort of feels like two friends going for a coffee hour to catch up. Which is nice".*

Empowerment

Empowering young people to have a voice was clearly evident from the young people's perspective, the young people who attended the focus group sit on a Housing forum. They noted they do this so that they can *"help change things for other young people"* (YP1). For example providing advice on a more young person friendly housing benefit form, and outlining issues to the local council, as noted by one young person: *"I feel like I am making a difference and being listened too, time will tell how much of a different if people put into practice what we suggest..."*(YP3).

YP 1: *"...all of us here are in the forum now and we talk about not only our experiences, the housing benefit form is quite complex form and it's I say it's quite intimidating. I hate having it in my hands. It's scary. They're both annoying, that's what we're improving at the moment. We're trying to suggest ways of like modernising it and making it more accessible. Yeah, making it more accessible for those who, you know needed".*

YP 3: *"Yeah, the housing form is just so complicated for people like such as ourselves and younger looking at it so overwhelming. So we're trying to work on ways that can make it more easier for them to fill out. Just making it online base having QR codes. We've batted some ideas about, you know, different languages changing the colour, changing the colours because of dyslexics or colour..."*

YP 2: *I've definitely gained more of a skill or confidence. To speak, speak to people a bit more, especially if it's something I'm passionate about. I do still struggle with some with like crowds and stuff, but I'm seeking therapy for that, and yeah, definitely confidence in myself, to be able to help others as well because part of our homelessness forum as well with the youth service is that we want to help other people that have been going through certain situations such as we did, and that is something that I want to do and I don't think I would have been able to speak up and open about things like that. If it wasn't for that, all the support I've had over the past few years".*

Concluding thoughts

From the young people's perspectives youth work offered them several positive options. It enabled them access to relevant housing support and additional support through a youth worker, support that was tailored to their individual needs and provided a platform for empowerment. The risks of homelessness are evidently reduced through a holistic, multifaceted approach; from a young person's perspective it was also life changing one young person noted that:

YP 1 *"...This might sound really like extra, but honestly, it's my truth. If I didn't have the use of this, I don't know where I'd be today. I actually don't like. I probably still wouldn't even know how to cook. Yeah, I don't even know where I'd be today if I didn't have the support, I'd be out on the streets. I'd, probably be the same with my dad if I'm being honest I'd be like my dad dead."*

Health and wellbeing

Focus

Benefits of youth work in supporting mental health and wellbeing

Introduction

The focus group illustrates the evidence from a focus group with six young people from a local authority youth wellbeing project. The young people's perspectives are included alongside evidence from published data on young people's wellbeing and emotional health. It outlines examples of the benefits of a youth work approach in supporting young people holistically through providing access to personal, social, and emotional education and emotional support, and providing opportunities for growth, development, and agency.

Context

Young people in the local community identified that they wanted support with their mental health, but either did not meet the threshold for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or did not wish to engage with health services. Following a detailed consultation with young people, a project influenced by Platform's "State of Mind" programme was developed to provide a non-clinical support group for young people where they could feel comfortable and could access support, information and guidance in an accessible, informal and relaxed way. A youth work project that aims to "provide a safe space for young people to talk, help young people make new friends and increase their education around mental health and teach them how they can support themselves and others who may be struggling with their mental health". Young people can engage with the 'START' programme, designed to support anxious young people or young people who struggle socially and includes sessions on topics such as building resilience, coping strategies, life skills, healthy eating, positive relationships, teamwork, and outdoor education experiences. Alternatively young people can access the 'RESTART' programme. This programme is designed to engage young people who are at risk in their local community or struggle with their behaviour in mainstream education and is delivered to a maximum of ten young people and includes core sessions focussed on building resilience, safety and exploitation prevention, substance use awareness, healthy relationships, and interpersonal skills development.

The project is a tailor-made programme for young people aged 13-18 delivered by youth service staff and young leaders who are fully qualified to deliver the Platform "State of Mind" programme. Raising confidence, agency and self-esteem is at the heart of the project which has evidenced how young people's emotional health and wellbeing has improved.

Themes

Five young people aged 14-18, identified the key benefits for them of engaging with youth work to support them with their emotional health and wellbeing.

Youth Work relationships and networks of support

The young people involved with the youth service in this project identified that it enabled them to have access to supportive networks of trusted adults and peers, information, support and guidance that matters to them and a greater sense of positive wellbeing:

YP 1: *".... it brought us closer together as a community, good to be friends with people in your community rather than being alone as we all give each other support, with that support we can all really help each other".*

YP 2: *"...good for me, I've noticed like that there's like people I can speak to – like if I don't want to speak to no one at home there's people I can speak to here it's really good in youth cos when I got kicked out, I'm like really shy and I don't like speaking to my social worker like and they helped me.... an tha do you like get me, I felt like I wasn't on my own."*

YP 3: *"...more of a safe environment, like you can trust them and get support you need and when you need it as well.... they know us so well and we trust them..."*

YP 5: *"before I never used to go out of my house, I never used to leave my house for anything I was so anxious and felt so isolated and when I did start leaving my house to come here it felt good to be involved, to be part of a community of people my own age".*

YP 4: *"If you are worried it's nice to feel more comforted by having someone there"*

Increased confidence

The group noted that youth work support built their confidence and encouraged their active participation and engagement in activities promoting improved emotional health and wellbeing.

YP 1: *"...definitely improved my confidence... at first I was no no didn't want to be around people and then....it made me come out of my shell and try new things and then went on to bigger and better things".*

YP 5: *"made me come out of my comfort zone, I never used to come out of my house, used to go to school come home sit in my house do nothing...then I started coming youth, come to youth to meet everybody like different ages and can just bond with so many people..."*

YP 3: “...made an impact on new younger people.. feel more comfortable speaking to me about stuff”

YP 4: “...the younger one’s bond with us (Young Leaders), ask us questions and if they need help or really shy, they come to us, and we help them bond with other people”.

YP 1: “...got me more confident, can friendship better.... feel like bonding with people better, made me realise different personalities and how difference is good”

YP 2: “ it’s like made me more confident with like meeting new people, like before I would never have gone up to someone and be like yow anna be mates...”

Emotional health support

Emotional health and wellbeing support was noted as important including the impact on reduced levels of social isolation, anxiety, aggression and violence.

YP 2: “ I was going downhill big time, I was running off a lot, getting in fights with my siblings, police was getting called non-stop...then I started coming club and I got that bit of help...I just wish I started coming club a bit sooner because I got that help, it helps me.....I got taken off mum because she couldn’t cope with me and now because I’ve got the mental help I needed they are slowly gonna ease me back to mum”.

YP 4: “can help everyone not just naughty kids or shy ones, everyone”

YP 3: “improved my mental health and wellbeing so much since I started coming here”

YP 5: “ I learnt hints and tricks when feeling anxious and self-harming...some time I ran away from care home came here and felt really heightened and heart was beating really fast and they said try box breathing”.

Increased knowledge and skills

The young people also reported significant impact on their knowledge and skills

YP 1: “after doing all the groups get a different perspective like on life for the better obviously cos you know a lot more and have the knowledge.... even recently when I went into college, I used the skills I developed in real life without even realising it”.

YP 3: “... we done healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships that was good because I done it when I was in year 10 and we were all in unhealthy friendships and

relationships but didn't know how to spot the signs or didn't know how to cut that off or what was acceptable so doing that helped to think maybe this friendship isn't right or maybe my boyfriend isn't treating me right, this is wrong, being shouted at ... maybe I need to get out of this now".

YP 4: "like they taught me so much stuff, gave me so much opportunity and inspirations that a couple months later I applied to be a youth volunteer which had to have an application and interview for which was a good experience as I never knew that process so now, I do young volunteers... I volunteer so much, I set up a skills group for the younger girls..... sessions on period poverty and stigma, we done friendships, and confidence as I feel that's a big issue at the minute.... done my level 1 in youth work".

YP 5: "I was looking for a job cos I was broke and they helped me with a CV and that and I emailed it and then I got a job".

YP 3: "I know youth has had an impact on my attendance as I couldn't get up in the morning, I'm the type of person I wouldn't speak to teacher but I can speak to them (youth workers) and then with help I can now trust my teacher and head of year".

Concluding thoughts

From the young people's perspectives youth work offered them a wealth of personal, social, emotional and educational development opportunities from a young person's perspective it was monumental one young person noted that:

YP 1 "...youth work pushed me, to like my limits, my limits are endless but like I don't think I would of got to where I am now without all the experiences they've given me and all the skill sets they've helped me develop, it's definitely set me up for the future, with everything I've learnt, and everything I've took part in, everything I've seen, it just makes me a better person".

Vignette: Strategic leads for youth work in Wales: Voluntary youth work sector chief executives; local authority Principal Youth Officers group:

The vignette illustrates the evidence from focus groups with key strategic leads from the voluntary and local authority youth work sector from across Wales: one with 14 Chief Executives and or their representatives from the voluntary youth work sector [VYWS] and two with a total of 21 Principal Youth Officers and their representatives. The impact of youth work within the identified five impact areas of this economic evaluation were discussed in the focus groups.

A range of published evidence was noted by both groups [VYWS, local authority PYO] in relation to individual project case studies, illustrating a range of evaluation and research that can further demonstrate the impact of youth work in the impact areas. Links to these can be found at the end of this section.

Context:

The focus group with the 14 CEOs represented a wide range of voluntary youth work sector organisations from a national and local level from across Wales (6 local organisations and 8 national). The two focus groups undertaken with in total 21 PYO and representatives reflected 20 local authority youth services from across Wales.

Themes

Impact

The five impact areas were discussed in the focus groups, it was evident from all focus groups that the impact areas are interlinked, namely because of the underpinning principles and purpose of youth work and its unique approach in supporting young people holistically.

i. Youth work approach

Holistic nature of youth work

The holistic nature of youth work and how it therefore supports all five impact areas was a key issue discussed in all focus groups; the following quotes highlight the interrelated nature of project outcomes and impacts:

VYWS P1: *“Youth Work has an holistic approach and can provide support in those areas from its approach / methods of being participative [Principles of youth work], volunteering, relationships, encouragement, fun, offering advice , signposting. But happens over time not overnight”.*

PYO P3: *“There isn't an area of a young person's life or community that youth work doesn't touch, you know, it encompasses it all, doesn't it”!*

VYWS P14: *“Difficult to separate these things out [5 impact areas]”*

PYO P17: *“Just to build on what [PYO] said really, I think the beauty of the work is we can sort of integrate holistic programmes that potentially in one session we can look at promoting all of them five in one session really can't we? In terms of like developing an integrated programme to address multiple areas, for example in a new sensor, you might be offering a workshop which is educational, maybe an aspect of your sport or well-being and also a volunteer opportunities that could happen in one session in one building. So, it's sort of integrates all of them and that's the beauty of youth work.... the youth voice would be part of this as well, so ensuring another*

young people are actually actively involved in this decision making. I think it's quite unique”.

VYWS P8: “Following on from [...], [...] trying to compartmentalise all this is very difficult because one of the things we do in youth work is to develop citizenship amongst young people and respect so that gives you further understanding of your community...”

PYO P1: “...project [name] we worked loads in partnership and....because of the work, there was a decrease in antisocial behaviour, improved youth relationships, improved youth well-being an increased sense of safety in the community. There were more diversionary activities on offer for young people, and there was more provision of a positive role model and mentor for young people and there was better mental and physical health, increased knowledge and skills, increased self-confidence, worth and respect and community cohesion so that were kind of benefits from a young person and communities’ kind of point of view. We also had benefits for our own service from our partners and from our own staff as well. It positioned us well in the local authority and in the Community”.

PYO P7: “...we've obviously had the launch of the [name of area] Community plan, which if you look at that Community plan and the objectives and expectations within that plan, it covers the majority of those things that you've outlined there in terms of community safety, health and well-being, education, training, community and volunteering.”

Uniqueness of youth work

The holistic nature of youth work links to its uniqueness of its approach, the following quotes illustrate how youth work is seen to be able to influence the impact areas with its approach:

VYWS P1: “Not just participation but underpinned by the four other Pillars of Youth Work - these can be assessed against the five key areas of the research”.

PYO P7: “Different methodologies have different impacts in different ways, but I think what we've found is that methodologies are inextricably linked. You know, targeted support isn't unconnected to open access youth work, and what we're currently doing is bringing all our disciplines together in a locality model to look at outcomes for young people. So what we found is what works really, really well is where we've got one to one support in our schools and young people are working caseload to, to individual staff that actually when those staff are also working in open access provision in the evenings that some of that work can carry on and some of that associated work can develop into group work activity so that that informal curriculum is cascaded from school based work, but into the evening, particularly around”.

PYO P5: “...we can't put enough emphasis on that voluntary engagement. You know, young people need to want to work with us. So, you know they, they need us. They need the youth workers, and you know, youth workers are persistent, they are the trusted adult and that role model, and that person that young people can trust, that they'll be there when they say they're going to be there. And you know, a lot of our young people have said, well, you've got no agenda, you haven't told me I have to do this, you haven't told me I have to be here, you haven't told me what to do, and you listen. So, I think those are all really key things that, you know, is why youth work is so impactful because we haven't really got an agenda”.

VYWS P9: *"A lot about Youth work is its ability to reach and do things with its methodology that other services find it difficult to do so...young people can walk away so we have to make a difference... in terms of economics we are reaching people who might not be getting anything our added value is even greater because not being supported elsewhere".*

VYWS P8: *"at some point in their lives all young people should as a right to youth work and in Welsh too".*

ii. Community safety

Community safety, it was noted in the focus groups is a multifaceted concept and can encompass many different perspectives and definitions. Youth work was viewed as providing the following impacts / benefits in this area: offering support and safe spaces for young people; offering diversionary activities and helps to address anti-social behaviour and county lines issues.

Safe spaces

The importance of youth work providing safe spaces for young people was a key issue discussed:

VYWS P2: *"...youth work offers safe spaces - especially centre based youth work for protected characteristics such as for LGBTQ groups who still unfortunately are victims of hate... diversion is important but for young people who experience hate crime its having a place to go where you can go and see a youth worker and feel protected and that to me is one of the key elements of community safety".*

VYWS P8: *"... as providers we provide these safe spaces as well, and these safe spaces contribute the community safety and the whole community and whether that's a residential, Welsh language group LGBTQ group its impossible to quantify it a so many benefits and that community safety comes back to being involved with peers, trusted adults in the community and showing respect to each other's, to other cultures and backgrounds".*

PYO P8: *"I find that kind of lack of understanding about what a positive impact is on a person's life. You know, those smaller journeys that we take young people on, ... they don't seem enough for some people we will have people coming out of the house for the first time in years, you will see that as a massive positive impact on their lives.... it doesn't affect your statistics, but it is having a massive impact on the young person's life".*

VYWS P7: *"...within our setting we have a very open minded and a tolerance about differences which is at odds with current society and what's going on the streets and actually young people being accommodating to each other gives us hope for the future. We have a general drop in , with NEET young people next to a LGBTQ+ group and nobody bats an eyelid and that's how it should be."*

Antisocial behaviour/ County Lines

PYO P7: *"...in terms of [LA] community safety, what that has brought forward is links as a youth service into wider strategic and operational groups around the safe agenda, so safe [...] from exploitation. So, we've got currently running within [LA] 27 lines running drugs and gangs within [LA] and [name of youth service] is involved in the disruption of those lines through one to one work, referrals from children's*

services and from youth justice, and provides not just diversionary activity but appropriate education training around those key concepts that young people don't necessarily grasp straight away when they're earning £1000 a week. They don't think they haven't got the power and we're working utilising education and training in our schools to do some of that preventative work around gangs, exploitation, the use of knives in our communities and we have virtual reality gangs programme."

PYO P8: *"Similar to what other people are saying, although nowhere near as bad as [PYO] with 27 lines, we worked in partnership with community safety, the police and we disrupted our first county line and there's statistics that shows how we brought like anti-social behaviour, crime fear rates down".*

PYO P1: *"We are really well linked into the CASP meetings, the crime and anti-social behaviour meetings, so we get, you know, good data on young people who've been involved in and social behaviour or risk of it, we get strike lists, we get hot spots of where young people are thought to be congregating. So, a lot of our outreach is informed through that and with conversations with young people".*

Diversionary activities

PYO P1: *"There were more diversionary activities on offer for young people, and there was more provision of a positive role model and mentor for young people.... respect and community cohesion...."*

VYWS P9: *"What do young people do if they have nowhere to go they can get in situations that is very dangerous don't have access to support, what's the cost to police and others? ..."*

PYO P17: *"...by using that contextual safeguarding approach, we could put youth work interventions in known hotspots. We can have detached and outreach youth work happening in those communities and that's been quite successful and that's actually led to us accessing some of the police and Crime Commissioner funding for the ASB hotspots. So, we're actually recruiting and appointing some staff to work alongside neighbour policing teams on the anti-social behaviour prevention hub to go out and do the police will call it patrolling. We will call it detached or outreach youth work with those young people who might be out looking to get into trouble. So that's something that we've done particularly well within community safety".*

VYWS P14: *"Safety is recognising awareness and having connectivity to others, so being involved in social contexts supports this... about when young people re fully involved and engaged they become active citizens and when engaged in activities can get the support they need".*

VYWS P6: *"...yes when we think of community safety - we tend to go directly to a target approach / negative connotations - but it is much wider than this" This participant noted the case studies of these activities that engage young people through sport through a recognised approach to develop and support community safety (see links at end of vignette)*

iii. Well-being and Emotional Health

The impact area of well-being and emotional health was noted as an increasing area of work that youth work is involved in and making an impact through working in partnership with providing support through youth work activities:

Partnerships to promote access to well-being and emotional health support:

Working in partnership was a key area discussed that youth work was contributing to around well-being and emotional health:

PYO P1: *"Another group that we sit on, which I think a lot of people will, is the space panel, which is all about emotional well-being mental health. So that is a multi-agency group that meets every Thursday and there's a pre panel allocation meeting on Tuesday. So, people referring to that you can self-refer parents refer GPS schools, any organisation refers in and then we've got a project called the [Project name] which is about emotional well-being and mental health, so we take referrals on and the strength of the methodology we use there is that we're non clinical....we do one to one or small group and the results and the relationships and the impact and the outcomes we get, we're always told like loads better than the relationship that that person had with their CAMHS worker or with the Social Worker or whatever, you know it seems like we're the cool ones that are OK to interact with and young people don't mind that".*

VYWS P11: *" We have seen a massive increase with young people with mental health problems and we work with [Name of Local Health Board] and we have 3 Mental health hubs its supposed to be low level referrals but the referrals that come in are actually high level and the waiting list is huge, it needs much more resources. Its linked to all the other areas such as housing, we have n LGBTQ+ group and there's a huge correlation between mental health and homelessness with young people from the community. Again it's very difficult to look at in the individual categories it's all interlinked".*

VYWS P7: *"...from a mental health and well-being is that we have funding from a local Health Board for early intervention, in our traditional youth work setting its recognised that this is important in alleviating future issues, if looking at from an economic perspective in the context of the NHS there's significant impact recognised in the work we do, and ranges across the board we can give case study examples of all areas".*

Youth work support/ activities

VYWS P6: *"I would also echo the points around mental health and wellbeing and the increase in 'informal' support being needed and provided through youth [sport] settings due to incredibly long waiting lists and not meeting the threshold to get a referral through a school or GP. Youth Workers and youth focused sport providers and trusted adults are now expected to provide this support/service on the ground, not always with proper support in place as professionals"*

VYWS P2: *"A lot of our clubs are sport based so obvious links to health and well-being there, but they have identified gaps in mental health for young men and a lot of our clubs have sadly experienced that first hand and started taking action around physical and mental health a lot of our clubs have well-being hubs now..."*

iv. Education and Training

The role of youth work in promoting education and training was discussed. This included the importance of developing confidence and social skills through youth work to help young people engage in education and training opportunities; how youth work supports economic activity through apprenticeships was also discussed:

Developing confidence / social skills

VYWS P9: "...young people who start engaging with us gain confidence and find they end up in employment because they need that first step on the ladder they might get stuff for CV but largely confidence, and support for their work".

PYO P18: "...having a say on the issues will affect them now and also in the future. And I hope that one of the expected benefits would be that we grow responsible and capable members of the community who feel involved and part of that decision making process. And just to say, I suppose that youth work is an opportunity to look at, life through a multifaceted lens of that transition between childhood and adulthood."

PYO P17: "In terms of linking in with social skills as well, with the five ways of well-being so interaction with peers, community involvement, so the five points you've you've raised here as part of this question are all sort of intertwined together really and it forms probably the main bulk of the work we do".

PYO P14: [youth work can] "address those risks of dropping out of education or supporting the ability for young people to stay within education successfully. We've got the time that often Teachers don't have within a school environment to support that one to one, mentor them, and really address the needs as they present from young people and tailoring bespoke bits of work, whether that be 1 to one or small group works to address some of those issues that are, you know, affecting young people wobbling out of education".

PYO P15: [through digital online youth work] "we're able to engage with young people who are a lot more socially isolated and there is certainly a big benefit".

Economic contribution

PYO P8: "...we do a lot of work on preventing young people from accessing those higher cost services. So, if we could get a value to that, that would be great".

VYWS P8 "...also in the [name of organisation] economic safety is part of offering employment for YP and value and reinvest in the local community and jobs in rural Wales and through apprenticeship".

PYO P20: "we're looking at our pathway to employment really. So, the full cycle of being employed as a youth worker. So, we've reinvigorated the young leadership programme, which probably links into volunteering and training. So, we're looking at opportunities for young people, which link to the qualifications and skills which they're gaining. So, we move them through, hopefully there should be a pathway from young leaders. And they kind of get into that in 14 plus age range then later moving into a kind of youth club youth worker with potentially then, the links to college, University and further qualifications. So, we're looking at that kind of cycle really as an opportunity for young people".

v. Community and Volunteering

Community and volunteering was viewed in the focus group discussions as an essential part of what youth work offers young people:

VYWS P2: "I think that Community is about young people feeling involved and part of their communities. This can be through them volunteering or just being involved in events. Meeting and feeling valued in the community. Also in [name of organisation] and other organisations here. Adult volunteering is saving the public purse huge amounts of money and benefitting young people..."

PYO P8: "...community and volunteering and the DV reports came out recently and they've got a value to the volunteering. So, you know, for example, it's about 46 K worth of volunteer in [LA], but you will have that from across all Wales I think".

PYO P15: "...the young people obviously will volunteer and the DoE was mentioned that that's an integral part to that and that very often leads to them remaining in whatever they were volunteering in beyond the time that they were pursuing the DoE award and that's become a way into youth work. But we're not getting the skills from other people within the community... everybody's quite interested in being paid, and really, they need some kind of incentive to actually come back and become volunteers".

vi. Housing

The focus groups outlined the role youth workers play in identifying young people at risk of homelessness:

VYWS P6: "Housing is also about prevention when we work with young people we are identifying those that are at risk of homelessness. So they can come into that homelessness pathway and systems, so we can do a lot of prevention work with them.. and have quite a big impact around that".

PYO P7: "Homeless prevention issues around independent living skills. That, you know, lend themselves to that informal curriculum delivery and Open Access youth work..."

PYO P15: "Housing is also interesting because I think the simple answer is regardless of what your youth service does now with the money we get for that agenda, there might be other things you're doing. There will be other things you're doing related to that agenda. I think what the result will be hard to prove a negative, but less young people ending up being homeless. And I think that's layered because it starts with messages. We're able to give in education settings like school or college to the outreach support stuff we do later on, then other targeted stuff as well as the focused housing stuff. So, it's not just about what support we give young people in crisis, it's all the stuff we put in before we get to there. When young people may come out with something in youth club like oh, when I'm 16, I'll get my own house and things like that. You know? So.... it gets challenged in a kind of conversational way and steered towards some thought, some thinking on that".

vii. Vision and barriers

The strategic vision for youth work was discussed in the focus groups. Central to the vision it was noted is "...the vision of best outcomes for young people..." [VYWS P13]. It was noted by all that the unique youth work approach was key to its strategic vision. However, for many PYO and VYWS their vision and aspirations for the youth service were limited by funding precarity and instability, issues of recruitment and retention and the lack of understanding of youth works approach and offer:

Youth work approach:

The youth work approach particularly being young person centred, participation and voluntary engagement are viewed as essential ingredients:

VYWS P1: "I would argue that one of things that that underpins all the 5 aspects [impactareas] and the benefits of youth work is the participation model and how

[name] and the voluntary working relationships with young people and older adults that's what binds them all together and this is what the youth work sector has to offer that others do not or can't do. So participation would knit them all together as the sector is very good at that...

VYWS P6: "Youth work not a one size fits all approach, that's very important and that's an important differential to make as that's not the case in other areas services. There's flexibility with a person centred approach and that is key to youth work being so effective when its done really really well. Its about young people first and understand them in their communities and their own contexts".

PYO P10: "obviously we are a lot more informal, we can meet young people in different spaces. They don't call us Sir or you know, anything like that but I just think the way that our staff work, informally, person centred, you know that that is on a voluntary basis. The young people don't have to engage with us if they're referred to us but I just think they're handled very sensitively, they are valued, they are respected and I don't think that that's necessarily the experience they've had with other professionals but some of the outcomes that we get and the compliments and the feedback you know, is outstanding".

Funding/ Workforce development

The issue of funding cuts and impacts on work force development that impact on the strategic vision of youth work are evident from the focus groups discussions:

PYO P6: "Now we're down to 20% core funded, 80% grant. Well, you know the vision then changes year upon year depends upon grant criteria and grants that are available to come in and deliver to those needs. And those services I think for us in [LA] we've prioritised universal services with our core money and our services then alongside that are supported through targeted work such as you know hitting on the community safety element, health and well-being for the families first, NEETS agenda... the difficulty is having the vision from all of us is that we you know we have investment and stability so that we can make plans to do all of the below which is expected in the sense of that wider community element and impact for young people. But you can't do that on no money, no budget and 80% of my service could be lost next March".

PYO P5: "Following on from [PYO] really, you know, to have the vision, you've got to have the right people in the right place, haven't you? And I think, you know, we've struggled as a sector in terms of, you know, recruitment and retention because of the stability and the fragility of the funding. You know, we can't give people those sort of permanent contracts. We offer sort of rolling, you know 12 months contracts and you know people have got families, people have got mortgages people have got to know so that has an impact on it and has an impact on the vision that we're able, to deliver".

VYWS P1: "Funding is huge barrier as is workforce development, one of the biggest is that we sit within the education sector and this is the toughest nut to crack but other sectors welcome us with open arms... Retention, recruitment, workforce development, understanding what we do..."

PYO P5: "...and we have been the same as [LA] with big reductions. We've, you know, we had 16 youth clubs or youth buildings and now we've got five. We don't own the buildings. You know, we are sort of renting space rather than having that community space that was ours".

PYO P3: *[youth worker salaries]* “When you look at it across the country, even though there's variation from local authority to local authority, there's also a lot of synergy around how much nurses get paid, police officers get paid, teachers get paid, social workers get paid.... the disparity between what [youth workers] are paidis massively different, you know it's something like a 10-12K difference so if you want a consistent good quality service across Wales, you need synergy. You need pay scales, you need everything to align, because otherwise you'll have pockets of good work and other young people will be disadvantaged based on geography”.

Visibility / Understanding of a youth work approach

A need to raise the profile and understanding of youth work at all levels was outlined from the focus groups:

PYO P12: *“In terms of local authority it has to be...the understanding from elected Members in terms of what youth work is and their agendas within the community whether they value young people within the community or whether they see young people as a nuisance within the community. So, you know it does depend on those individual Members and you know here in [LA] we're trying to work with our members, but some of them are reluctant, resistant and still see young people as a as a nuisance within in their community. I think that's important in terms of a barrier because yeah, it takes up a lot of time if you've got an elected member who doesn't understand young people, doesn't understand youth”.*

PYO P8: *“We were some of the only services that out there in the community still working with people and what that did is raised the profile of youth work and the demand on youth workers now is through the roof but we just haven't got the capacity in a similar way to what [PYO]said about community based provision..... I would provide these the services if we had the money to do it, but we just haven't”.*

PYO P2: *[we may need to defend]“...why youth work is 11 to 25. I know we've had to fight a battle and there may be one coming over the hill again now for youth workers to register as child carers and you know, we've always said, well, firstly childcare is under 11 and we deal with over 11 and secondly youth work is an education provision, not childcare. On the on that basis, we've sort of pushed those claims away, but there... is a philosophical argument, isn't there, which neurological science is proving more and more over time. We know now that the human brain is malleable well into the mid late 20s. Talking about making as much as we can of our wins with young people, this is something we're missing again, because all the money's gone into, you know, the first thousand days, the early years, and like, nobody's arguing the point they're important but there needs to be a recognition and better understanding of neurology and a better apportioning then of funding into work with young people [in adolescence and early adulthood]”.*

Concluding thoughts

The focus groups with the VYWSO and the PYOs demonstrates how the sector recognises through its specific youth work approach that it can and does contribute positively to all the five impact areas often within a holistic way.

The vision of wanting to continue to promote “positive outcomes” for the young people of Wales is evident, this is despite some of the identified barriers of sustainability of funding, workforce retention/recruitment and the need to ensure there is recognition of youth work as a valued approach.

Examples of publicly available case studies, evaluation/ research and community plans that illustrate the wider impact of youth work in Wales:

1. [Actions for Our Community - A summary of the Community Plan for Ely and Caerau 2024 \(aceplace.org\)](#)
2. [Case-Study-Jack_YMCASWANSEA.pdf](#)
3. [Case Studies – Challenge Wales](#)
4. [FW Ceredigion County Council amended March 2023 Support and Prevention project \(002\).pdf.msg](#)
5. [Safer Streets Fund- QulP Study - Bath SDR : Bath SDR](#)
6. [StreetGames Theory of Change - StreetGames](#)
7. Urdd Economic Impact Report:
[https://www.urdd.cymru/files/2117/0125/3245/Urdd Economic Impact Report 2022-23.pdf](https://www.urdd.cymru/files/2117/0125/3245/Urdd_Economic_Impact_Report_2022-23.pdf)
8. https://linktr.ee/PAC_Cymru
9. <https://waleswithoutviolence.com/>
10. <https://mediaacademycymru.wales/peer-action-collective/>

