

STATEMENT

on the nature and purpose of youth work

Statement on Youth Work Background

One of the priorities in the Scottish Executive's Partnership Agreement, *A Partnership for a Better Scotland*, is a commitment to develop a National Youth Work Strategy. In support of the development of the Scottish Executive's Strategy, YouthLink Scotland's Policy Forum has led the drafting of a statement on the nature and purpose of youth work. The aim was to see if it was possible to gain broad support for such a definition across the youth work sector.

Following in depth discussions, the Policy Forum produced a working definition of youth work, consultation on which was approved by YouthLink Scotland's Board. That consultation involved analysis of the draft statement by one of the workshops at YouthLink Scotland's annual conference, and discussions with representatives from some of our member organisations. The statement was then discussed separately by YouthLink's Members' Network, the Voluntary Organisations' Chief Officers' Group (VOCOG) and Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS). Adjustments were made in the light of the consultations and the draft Statement was presented for final comment at a joint event involving these three networks and the Policy Forum on 24 March 2005.

YouthLink Scotland's Statement on the nature and purpose of youth work received widespread support across the youth work sector. It is hoped that the Statement will help to inform the development of the National Youth Work Strategy.



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STATEMENT ON THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF YOUTH WORK

Context

Youth work plays a key role in delivering the principles outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12, the right of the young person to voice their opinion, have their views listened to and be taken seriously. By engaging young people in social activism, youth work builds citizenship, respect for human rights and a sense of mutual responsibility.

Introduction

Youth work is an educational practice contributing to young people's learning and development.

Youth work engages with young people within their communities; it acknowledges the wider networks of peers, community and culture; it supports the young person to realise their potential and to address life's challenges critically and creatively; it takes account of all strands of diversity.

Youth work takes place in a variety of settings including community venues, uniformed groups, schools, youth cafés and on the street, whilst using numerous approaches such as outdoor pursuits, drama workshops, health initiatives, peer education and single issue and single gender work to engage with young people.

The effectiveness of youth work methods has led to an increasing number of organisations developing youth work approaches, for example those working in youth justice and health improvement programmes. This demonstrates the range of ways youth work can be applied,

enabling young people who might otherwise be alienated from support to get the services they need. The youth work sector welcomes these developments and seeks to co-operate with those who contribute to young people's social and personal development.

However, there remains a fundamental need for community based youth work which has been eroded as a service in recent years, at a time when young people are under greater pressure than ever, especially the most disadvantaged.

Purpose of Youth Work

The purpose of youth work was well defined in Step it Up, following extensive discussion and consultation with the youth work sector, and is as follows:

- Build self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Develop the ability to manage personal and social relationships.
- Create learning and develop new skills.
- Encourage positive group atmospheres.
- Build the capacity of young people to consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.
- Develop a 'world view' which widens horizons and invites social commitment.

Age Range

The decisive pre-requisite for a young person's participation in youth work remains their youth. Youth work's focus is on the 11-25 year age group with particular emphasis on 11-18 year olds. It acknowledges the need to connect effectively with early intervention programmes and provision which focuses on children under 11 years.

Youth Work has three essential and definitive features:

Young people choose to participate

The young person takes part voluntarily. She/he chooses to be involved, not least because they want to relax, meet friends and have fun. The young person decides whether to engage or to walk away.

The work must build from where young people are

Youth Work operates on young people's own personal and recreational territory – within both their geographic and interest communities. The young person's life experience is respected and forms the basis for shaping the agenda in negotiation with peers and youth workers.

Youth Work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process

The young person is recognised as an active partner who can, and should, have opportunities and resources to shape their lives. The relationship and dialogue between the young person and youth worker is central to the learning process.

Conclusion

The characteristics and purpose detailed in this leaflet define youth work. Youth work is an empowering process. Youth work is thus one of the very few practices whose remit provides for young people to exercise genuine power – to take decisions, follow them through and take responsibility for their consequences. Youth work seeks to tip the balance of power in young people's favour.

References

1. Step it Up... The Report of the National Development Project entitled "Defining the Purpose of Youth Work and Measuring Performance". University of Strathclyde and The Prince's Trust Scotland (May 2003)
2. National Occupational Standards for Youth Work. PAULO NTO (Jan 2002)
3. Do young people still need Youth Work? Bernard Davies from "Conceptualising Youth Work: Back to the Future" Ed. Murphy and Shaw (1999)