

5 Ways Youth Work is Closing the Attainment Gap

“ Youth work can help to empower and improve learning and resilience for our most disadvantaged communities ”

National Improvement Framework

To meet the challenge of closing the attainment gap in Scotland formal education providers need to work differently with a range of partners. Youth work has a long track record of effective prevention and intervention work with young people, supporting them to be more resilient, optimistic for the future, consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.

The National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19 has the ambition that all young people have access to quality youth work. This is most important for young people from deprived communities and those who face other disadvantages, those furthest away from reaching their potential. Youth work organisations are already key partners for many schools in Scotland.

1 INCREASES SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Youth work has a track record of supporting young people furthest from attainment through one-to-one and group support with evidenced positive outcomes including re-engagement with formal education, qualifications, improved social skills and increased employability prospects.

Young people who attend an LGBT-specific youth group at some point in their lives are more likely to say they are 'very happy' with their lives compared with those who had not.¹

Young people accessing one-to-one youth work support at The Corner, Dundee report a 98% reduction in distress.²

2 SUPPORTS TARGETED APPROACHES TO LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Research has shown that summer programmes involving youth work partners can counter disproportionate learning loss in literacy and numeracy for young people from deprived communities.³ As well as providing academic support, youth work transition programmes focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of young people helping them to adjust to a new learning environment.

This support also extends to the transition from secondary school to a young person's next step and with difficult life events such as bereavement. 90% of young people involved with Arran Youth Foundations said activities helped with reading and writing.

¹ LGBT Youth Scotland, *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Community & Identity*, 2013, p. 4.
<https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/policy-consultations>

² The Corner, Dundee

³ RAND, Make Summer Count

⁴ Awards Network

⁵ Scottish Gas Survey

⁶ YouthLink Scotland, Activity Agreements Data Summary 2015/16

3 GAIN QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY

For young people who are struggling to gain academic qualifications, youth awards provide an avenue for their skills and knowledge to be recognised and credited. Between 2009/10 and 2014/15 there was a 273% increase in the number of awards being offered to young people.⁴ Awards help young people prove their skills and dedication whilst also boosting their confidence.

Eight in 10 employers in Scotland believe job-seekers should focus on soft skills just as much as their grades.⁵ Young people are developing key employability skills through engagement with youth work such as self-confidence, decision-making, communication skills, team working skills and a sense of personal responsibility.

Three in four of the young people involved with The Prince's Trust go into education, jobs and business.

74% of young people involved in an Activity Agreement moved on to employment, formal learning or further training.⁶

4 DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT

Youth work uses innovative approaches to learning in order to provide differentiated support to young people. SALE (Supported Access to Learning and Employability) in North Lanarkshire supports young people to undertake an individual programme of learning out with the usual school setting. 60% of the young people attending the programme showed improvements in attendance, with some individuals making significant improvements for example 2% to 91% attendance.

5 ENGAGING BEYOND THE SCHOOL

We know that wider family and community involvement is an important part of closing the attainment gap. Youth work as part of Community Learning and Development engages with the whole community, including parents and families and is available in the evenings, weekends and during the holidays.

Furthermore, intergenerational projects achieve the dual outcome of supporting young people and reducing isolation of elderly people.

“ Brannock High School places a high value on our partnerships with youth work. Pupils benefit greatly from innovative, creative and stimulating experiences, which help them develop fine personal skills and abilities, to best prepare them for life beyond the school. ”

Robert Colquhoun, Head Teacher

“ My school attendance levels were at 23%. This was having a big impact on my achievements at school and I struggled to keep up with the workload. In the space of 4 months (of engaging with Plusone mentoring) my attendance went up to 98%. ”

Young Person, Bellshill and Mossend YMCA

“ Youth work practice is invaluable for effectively providing Curriculum for Excellence and enhancing wider attainment. ”

Mike Will, Depute Head teacher