



Acting on **POVERTY**

How Youth Scotland's vital work supports
the most affected communities



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“ You have no idea what this [funding] means to me and my kids. I was thinking I was going to have to sell my belongings just to put food on plates but now I know that the kids will be fed and I feel much more relaxed and less stressed.”

Parent supported by Youth Scotland Winter Fund



This report demonstrates that funding Youth Scotland and its programmes directly impacts communities most affected by poverty and makes a tangible difference to the lives of young people and their families.

Around one in four children in Scotland are living in poverty. Boys born in low-income communities in Scotland are predicted an average of 47 years of healthy life, for girls this stands at 50, both almost two decades less than children born in higher income communities.¹ In 2017, the Child Poverty Act was passed in Scotland, setting out targets to reduce the number of children experiencing poverty by 2030.

Youth Scotland's network reaches 82,571 young people across every Local Authority, with 64% of member groups operating in SIMD 1-5 postcodes and 65% of our youth awards participants being in SIMD 1-5. Our work builds youth work capacity, provides essential training, opportunities for young people and critical funding to those communities. Our work supports this demographic.



Scotland's worst affected communities have been faced with the impact of UK-wide austerity and cuts, the global COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the cost of living crisis.

“ We have been hearing how anxious parents/carers are about how they are going to cope with the increase in energy prices [...] and the rising cost of living. Having the option to give families vouchers during this time period supports them to be able to manage the first month of increases.”

Youth Scotland member group

Wellbeing and the pandemic

A few years after the Child Poverty Act was passed, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people were confined to their homes, their education disrupted, and their lives moved online. In a survey by Public Health Scotland, around 3 in 10 children were found to need more support for difficulties with their emotions, behaviours and mental health. It also found that the impacts of the pandemic were felt to a greater extent in families from low-income households: the percentage of children with scores of 'high concern' in categories relating to behaviour was at least double in the lowest income category compared to the scores in the highest income category.²

Financial challenges

Many families struggled to meet their basic needs, particularly those on lower incomes. The parents and carers from 32% of low-income households stated that loss of income due to the pandemic impacted their ability to pay for things they needed, this was just 6% for high-income households.³ The parents from 24% of low-income households stated they would require future support for financial problems after the pandemic while this was only 1% for high-income households. Digital exclusion was a problem



for young people from low-income households, some of whom did not have access to appropriate devices or internet connectivity and were therefore unable to engage in online learning.⁴

Rural communities

Around 21% of Scotland's population lives in rural areas.⁵ The pandemic dealt a huge blow to rural economies through the closure of many businesses and the loss of jobs in the tourism and hospitality sectors.⁶ This has a knock-on effect on children and young people, particularly as young people in these areas often take on seasonal work. In the Highlands and Islands, youth unemployment rose from 3.8% to 9.9%.⁷ There are also higher rates of digital exclusion in rural areas which impacted on children's ability to engage in remote learning, and people's access to support services during the pandemic. Additionally, the rising cost of fuel and transport disproportionately affects rural communities,⁸ creating additional barriers to accessing even basic services.

The future

Even before the pandemic, child poverty was rising in Scotland,⁹ but the challenges facing children from low-income households were exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Though communities have transitioned out of lockdown, financial pressures continue to affect low-income households the most.

Inflation has reached a 40-year high and is forecast to rise higher; food prices have increased by over 6%; and the energy pricecap is set to rise to £2,800 a year in October,¹⁰ all provoking a cost of living crisis that will have a dramatic impact on those already in living in poverty.

Despite the ongoing challenges, the youth sector fosters resilience and focuses on recovery. Youth groups continue to build strong relationships with local communities, pairing tried and tested methods of supporting children and young people with innovative new interventions.



Youth Scotland is the largest national youth work organisation in Scotland, supporting 82,571 young people, 1,730 youth groups and over 9,397 youth workers. Youth Scotland's membership is made up of a network of local Area Associations, youth groups, youth workers and volunteers from every local authority in Scotland. Youth Scotland supports this network of community youth groups by providing: key training; information and guidance; resources; accredited youth awards; capacity-building; direct youth work programmes; and access to funding.

“ The resources and training have been invaluable in enabling us to move forward with confidence.

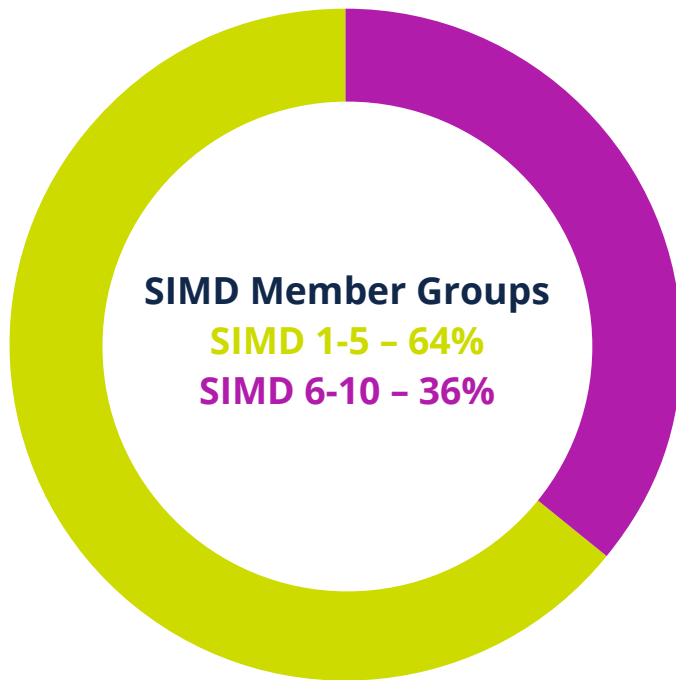
The proactive and unstinting professional support, solidarity and very high standards instil a huge pride in the care and professional standards of youth work and just wanted you and the Team to know it is hugely appreciated and empowering in very challenging times for us all.”

Youth Scotland member group

Where community-based youth groups are well positioned to support vulnerable children and families, Youth Scotland is in a position to support those groups.

During the pandemic, Youth Scotland moved quickly to adapt its suite of worker and young people training for an online audience. Topics included: Introduction to Zoom, Child Protection Training, Ready for Youth Work, Awards Training, Wellbeing and Mindfulness Training, and much more. The demand for training increased substantially, up to 5,295 volunteers, workers and managers upskilled, almost doubling the previous year's total of 2,744. Digital delivery allowed training to reach our groups from all over Scotland.

Youth Scotland also offered support to youth workers with navigating youth provision amidst the changing COVID-19 restrictions. The COVID-19 guidance page on our website which helped youth groups to put government regulations into practice had 14,409 unique visitors from March 2020–March 2022. Youth



Scotland staff also spoke directly to youth groups who had specific queries to offer further guidance and support.

Addressing the poverty-related attainment gap

Youth Scotland's youth awards continued to be available to groups, families and young people throughout the pandemic, and materials were quickly adapted to support remote delivery. Where awards training was originally a chargeable item along with the submission of Hi5 and Dynamic Youth Awards, Youth Scotland made this free to member groups during lockdown. During April 2020–March 2021, 4,670 young people completed awards, 35% from SIMD 1 and 2 areas. Youth Scotland's youth awards make it possible for youth workers to accredit activities that young people are taking part in with their youth group. Young people can opt to do a Hi5 Award (SCQF Level 2), a Dynamic Youth Award (SCQF Level 3), or a Youth Achievement Award (SCQF Levels 4–7). Gaining accredited awards contributes to young people's sense of achievement and confidence, as well as giving them something tangible to put on their college applications or CV. Youth awards are particularly useful for those young people for whom formal education does not meet their learning style or needs, offering alternative pathways to accrediting achievement.

Youth Scotland also runs projects, events and programmes supporting and recognising young people's leadership and development. Youth Scotland members can request that a member of Youth Scotland staff come in and deliver a session with their group or can come along to larger national events. These programmes have a dual benefit: providing an exciting developmental opportunity for young people; and demonstrating best practice to youth workers who can then replicate activities with their groups.

Extra support for low-income communities

Universal youth work is open to all, but the work of Youth Scotland and its members often benefits communities with higher levels of deprivation. This is evident in Youth Scotland's membership statistics, with 64% of member groups based in SIMD 1–5 areas, and 27% in SIMD 1 and 2 areas in April 2021–March 2022. Our Youth Awards similarly reach more young people based in lower SIMD areas – 60% of the awards (6,112 total) from the same period went to young people based in SIMD 1–5, and 31% to those in SIMD 1 and 2. There is also a benefit to universal youth work encouraging mixing between young people from areas with different SIMD levels, promoting social mobility and better understanding of those with different backgrounds.



While Youth Scotland already serves many communities with higher levels of need through universal youth work, we are also aware that targeted work is required in order to reach the young people who most need support. Alongside Youth Scotland's membership offer to all youth groups, we offer a number of targeted interventions designed to reach children and young people experiencing challenges associated with deprivation.

Generation CashBack

Funded by CashBack for Communities, our Generation CashBack programme is delivered across a Consortium comprising Youth Scotland, Girlguiding Scotland, Boys' Brigade, and Scouts Scotland. It centres around two main strands of project delivery ('Grow' and 'Lead'), tasked with growing the capacity of our member groups to support young people, and increasing engagement in disadvantaged communities.

In order to identify groups in need of support, Generation CashBack calculates the top 20% most deprived data zones within any given Local Authority area using the SIMD, as opposed to the national measure, which ensures we reach urban, rural and island communities throughout Scotland. We also use our relationships with local stakeholders to identify groups who are facing particular challenges around anti-social behaviour or supporting young people who are at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system.

During April 2021–March 2022, Generation CashBack reached 3,293 young people. The majority of delivery reached young people facing the most extensive deprivation – 77% of participants lived in SIMD 1 and 2 areas. 99% of participants reported that Generation CashBack had had a positive impact on their behaviour, 97% of young people reported improved wellbeing against the SHANARRI indicators, and 98% reported feeling more confident.

“ Yeah, no, it's like we both before this were very shy. Like very shy. Doing this has really helped me.” – Young person who participated in Generation CashBack activity

“ It's fun to have fun and forget about all your problems and a space away from school and not to think about school.” – Young person who participated in Generation CashBack activity

“ Best club I have been to, stops me and my friends getting in trouble across at the community centre.” – Young person who participated in Generation CashBack activity

“ It helps me get like my temper out, gone. I'm no getting in as much trouble outside an that – I used to get polis chases all the time before I started coming here.” – Young person who participated in Generation CashBack activity

“ We need the help and support now, so the responsiveness is great. We’ve only got two staff, so the turnaround is important. When you’ve got over a 190 young people you normally work with – and no way to meet face-to-face – you wonder how it’s going to work.

It’s letting us reach young people who, let’s be honest, are having a pretty bleak and monotonous day right now. We can reassure and keep our relationships built on trust and support.”

Youth Scotland member group



The Youth Scotland Action Fund, Winter Fund and Spring Fund

Youth Scotland and its network of community-based youth groups was uniquely positioned to support and identify young people and families struggling to meet the financial requirements to support their children. Throughout the pandemic, Youth Scotland demonstrated its reach into the communities most affected, dispersing funding and microgrants rapidly to make an immediate difference.

In March 2020, the Youth Scotland Action Fund launched and its purpose was to enable youth groups to purchase essential items that will enable them to continue working with young people throughout social distancing and restrictions. The fund was made possible by key funders: STV Appeal, The Robertson Trust, The Gannochy Trust, The Ponton House Trust, Cattanach and Scottish Government’s Wellbeing Fund.

After demonstrating the ability to get support to the most needful families, the Winter Fund and Spring Fund evolved to continue to provide essential support in those communities.

Youth Scotland supported STV Children’s Appeal and the Scottish Government to disperse funds to children, young people and their families who are experiencing poverty. The grants were distributed to youth groups, who then provided financial support to families so that they could afford food, clothes, toiletries, and other household essentials. Youth groups were able to decide what format to distribute the funds



in, depending on what best suited the families receiving support.

These measures included food hampers, fuel cards, data top-ups, assisted shopping, and vouchers, among others. Youth Scotland provided a total of £120,000 through 58 grants to youth groups in 21 of Scotland's Local Authority areas. The youth groups then made 952 awards.

“ Being granted this additional funding has given us the opportunity to support financial relief to low-income families in our community in a way in which we couldn't before.” – Youth Scotland member group

“ I am so happy that we got some help to put electricity in the meter and got some food. My mum is so much more calm and we are all a lot happier.” – Young person aged 13 supported by Youth Scotland Winter Fund

“ This fund is an amazing opportunity for organisations like ourselves to be able to get past the doorstep of some of the most difficult families and allow them to accept some help and support which then allows us to offer some further support and point them in the right direction of further support mechanisms and help with things like benefits advice, etc.” – Parent supported by Youth Scotland Winter Fund

“ This has helped us so much; I don't need to worry about what we will be eating next week or how we can afford it” – Parent supported by Youth Scotland Winter Fund

“ Getting this support from local organisations who know us made it easy and less confusing. I couldn't believe how understanding and supportive the staff were. This funding has truly made a massive improvement to my family's life.” – Young parent supported by Youth Scotland Winter Fund

“ I wanted to go to the Holiday Club but it was meant to snow and rain! The youth worker said wear waterproof shoes but I phoned to cancel because there were holes in the soles of my shoes. They went out and bought me a lovely pair of boots with fur on them. I thought I was just to borrow them but they said they were mine and I could keep them. That was really kind. Thank you.” – Young person aged 12 supported by Youth Scotland Winter Fund

The holistic benefits of community-based youth work

The Youth Scotland network is made up of 1,730 community-based youth groups, comprising a key support to children and families across Scotland. Youth groups are often firmly rooted in the local community, holding pre-existing positive relationships with young people and parents, and an awareness of which families may be struggling.

As much of youth work provision is universal and open to all local young people, there is no stigma attached to accessing it. These factors put youth groups in a strong position to identify and support families who require extra help.



“ People are telling us they are desperately struggling to manage including lower income working families, as well as those on benefit.” – Youth Scotland member group

“ As the relationships grew it made the distribution of [Youth Scotland Winter Fund funding] easier with parents and older young people being open about their needs and the situations that they are in. Good relationships meant that we had a good understanding of what shops would meet the needs of our families and bought vouchers accordingly... By working this way we felt we respected the families’ dignity and ensured that the trust and respect grew both ways.”
– Youth Scotland member group

The Scottish Government have identified that families requiring support are having to access ‘an increasingly complex set of services’.¹¹ Tying support in with the local, community youth groups that they already engage with can be a useful route in.

“ Working with other partners we were able to signpost families to other services – money advice workers, food bank support, fuel support, and access to housing officers.” – Youth Scotland member group

In a time when reports show that young people are struggling more than ever with isolation, poor mental health, worries about their education, and much more, Youth Scotland’s members have offered crucial online and face to face spaces where young people can socialise, have fun, build skills, and feel purposeful.

“ It [phone top up from project] helped me keep in touch with all my friends. When I got it, I phoned every single one of my friends, because I’ve not seen them in a long time. And then, they were happy that I kept in touch.” – Young person from Youth Scotland Generation CashBack supported group

“ We can play pool, air hockey, go on the PS4. You have a little chat if like something’s bothering you. Yeah, you can even make like a pot noodle if you really want, you can play board games.” – Young person from Youth Scotland Generation CashBack supported group



Youth Scotland is uniquely positioned to develop and promote community-based youth work. Through support for universal youth work, alongside targeted programmes, Youth Scotland is working to achieve our mission of supporting all young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their start in life.

Funding Youth Scotland and its programmes is funding work that will directly impact communities most affected by poverty and make a tangible difference to the lives of young people and their families.

Youth Scotland continues to respond to the training needs of the youth sector, developing new offers that further enable youth workers to support young people facing multiple complex barriers. This includes the development of a new ACEs Aware pathway, which will train youth workers in trauma informed practice, making services for young people more accessible and inclusive.

The youth work sector will continue to provide crucial support for young people, families and communities that are struggling during the ongoing cost of living crisis. Youth groups are well placed both to support communities in accessing essential supplies and services, and also to bring joy and hope at a time when they are much needed.



1. *"Poverty in Scotland 2021"*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p.3
2. *"Are the Kids Alright?"*, Public Health Scotland, p.5
3. *"Are the Kids Alright?"*, Public Health Scotland, pp.16-17
4. *"Digital Exclusion in Scotland"*, Inspiring Scotland
5. Data from The Scottish Public Health Observatory, 2018
6. *"Rural Poverty Report 2021"*, Mark Shuckwith et al., p.22
7. *"Covid-19, lockdowns and financial hardship in rural areas"*, Jayne Glass et al., p.6
8. *"Transport And Poverty In Scotland"*, Poverty And Inequality Commission, p2-3
9. *"Poverty in Scotland 2021"*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p.4
10. <https://www.gov.scot/news/urgent-action-needed-on-cost-of-living/>
11. *"Best Start, Bright Futures"*, Scottish Government, p.50

Assorted Support Through Lockdown

Generation CashBack's crucial role in a fast-changing youth work context

Based in Clydebank, Youth Scotland member group Y Sort it, supported by Generation CashBack, offers programmes and activities for young people across the local communities in West Dunbartonshire. Flexible support from Youth Scotland enabled staff at Y Sort It to adapt and upskill, so their essential youth work offer could continue throughout lockdown.

For this case study we hear from Allan Young, Youth Work and Outreach Co-ordinator at Y Sort It. He told us that Youth Scotland allowed them to enhance their capacity and deliver youth work through new digital platforms. The youth group

has been supported to experiment and offer new activities to young people. They have introduced new ways of working with families to encourage outside play and community spirit.

In the second part of this case study we hear from Leslie, the mum of one of the young people who engages with Y Sort It. She talked about how essential the support from Y Sort It throughout lockdown has been for her daughter and for herself.



Flexible support from Youth Scotland enabled Y Sort It to adapt and respond to young people's needs in a confusing and ever-changing context.

"Getting a Zoom package was part of the support from Generation CashBack. Originally we thought we were going to have to use some of the funding to help young people get online, but they were supported to do that through other streams. The funding has been flexible, which means now we can think about reallocating it to face to face work."

"We've been able to deliver general youth group sessions, activities and issue based sessions too, for example on sexual health, budgeting and finance. Young people engaged with these really well and consistently attended."

"In one of the groups chats someone shared an article about lockdown going on for two years, and the group chat went crazy. So we had to chat about what had happened, about how lockdown was going to last and we did a lot of work unpicking some falsehoods."

Lockdown was an opportunity for Y Sort It to extend their reach and meet wider community needs including tackling food insecurity and supporting young people to return outdoors, when it was safe to do so. With support from Generation CashBack, they created time and safe spaces for socially distanced play, bringing people in the community together through outdoor activities and food.

"With Pick, Play & Picnic we can invite families to come along to local neighbourhood parks. We're hoping to engage with some of the young people we haven't been able to engage with through lockdown as we didn't have their contact details. This is one of the highest SIMD areas and the support will enable us to offer a picnic element to those play sessions. We'll use it to provide them with a lunch pack that should also help them through the weekend where they may not be able to access other community food support. It's national picnic month this month, so it will be fun!"

"Some parents might be hesitant to let their kid out, these sessions we're doing are around lunch time so with it being in the middle of the day it mitigates that safety element. If the parents come out they'll see it is safe and the staff are able to moderate and keep everyone safe."

Youth Scotland's Local Development Officers (LDOs) added capacity to the Y Sort It team and helped to build on the success of the online sessions by introducing fun, new activities.

"We're keen to keep the digital youth work going as well. Through Stuart (LDO) we've managed to get some more issue-based groups going. Having the LDOs in to facilitate those sessions it means that our other two staff have been freed up to focus on the play and detached sessions, otherwise they would have been dropped. They've helped us to put together a programme of activity, for example 'Be Internet Citizens' will help young people explore a range of topics from fake news to hateful content."

"We're encouraging those families who are maybe apprehensive about getting back out into parks, with having our staff there who are able to facilitate safe play sessions, and give them good resources to get families outside and playing again. As well as it being fun, it's about building ownership and that community spirit."

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Youth groups supported by Generation CashBack can access resources and benefits through partners' membership organisations. Youth Scotland's training has been an essential resource

"The LDOs have supported us to get training too. Most of the staff have done online child protection training through Youth Scotland over lockdown which has been a massive help as we've moved everything online."

“Support from the LDOs has been invaluable. To have the capacity and the expertise to deliver these pure amazing sessions – like laughter yoga! It's going to be chaos.”

“Digital youth work wasn't a massive thing before lockdown. We had to sort it out quickly, and switch everything up.”

The parent of a young person supported by Y Sort It described how important the youth group has been for the family through lockdown.

Her daughter was recently assessed as having multiple learning difficulties and is a young carer for her mum. Y Sort It have helped her daughter feel supported and kept busy, engaged and positive throughout a really difficult time.

"I don't know where we'd be without Y Sort It, honestly. She can be doing up to three Zoom calls a day with them. I thought I would get to see more of her with it being lockdown but that's not the case! I hear her laughing from the living room, she just has so much fun on them, I'll go in and pop my head in and say hi to everyone. It's given her connection as she is still able to see people."

Y Sort It has been invaluable for the local community in challenging circumstances, providing food parcels, sanitary products and essential equipment for families in crisis.

"My daughter has become a very good cook through all this! They deliver what she needs to do the cooking and they've been making cakes too, they go through all the steps with her."

"Another person in our household had coronavirus symptoms so we had to self-isolate for two weeks, and Y Sort It were amazing, with food parcels ... I can't thank them enough."

"We had a separation in the family; some left and took all their kitchen equipment, so we needed to get some new bits for the house quite quickly. Y Sort It put us in contact with this recycling organisation so we could get a toaster, microwave and kettle."

"For the community they've been travelling all over Dunbartonshire Council delivering food parcels. They are doing a clothing drive too. Care packages as well, for females, they've been doing sanitary towels and body wash... They've gone above and beyond."

Peace of mind for the family, and vital support for young people; Allan and the other youth workers are trusted adults in a time of crisis.

"I had a bad fit yesterday. My daughter looked after me. It is a scary thing to see. She messaged Allan, because she was upset and a bit shocked. Allan phoned her straight away and said to let him know if either of us needed anything."

Her daughter has become a vital member of the youth group and she relishes the opportunity to help others.

"She has been a volunteer with Y Sort It since 14, she is heavily involved with the group and she feels important. A lot of kids will go up to her and confide in her, if there are things going on at home, she can tell the workers, but they find it easy to talk to her. She can now spot signs in kids too if she thinks they have behaviour issues. She seems to be able to calm other kids down, she has a lot of patience."

“ The support they give is fantastic. Y Sort It have male and female workers so she can speak to anyone without judgement. She worries about things, so I'm really glad she has other people apart from me to speak to.”

Making a Splash

Youth Scotland member group The Ripple is a community-based youth project supporting the communities of Restalrig, Craigentenny and Lochend in North East Edinburgh. They are also an active member of LAYC. The project received Generation CashBack support from Youth Scotland, through Development Worker advice, staff training and equipment. This enabled the group to shift to an outreach approach, to trial online engagement, and to continue to reach a broad range of young people during a difficult period of time.

In this case study, Danielle, Youth Services Manager, and Tuesday, a Youth Worker, reflects on lockdown in 2020, a time of severe restriction for youth work services, when The Ripple successfully changed tack.

Ordinarily, the project runs its activities from 'the hub' where "the whole idea is that it's aimed at different young people every night". Drop-ins are aimed at harder to reach young people, "some of them we know are causing a bit of disturbance out and about, and maybe are a bit, you know, non-engaged in education and probably are creating a bit of trouble socially in the community". A boys group and a girls group have more planned activities and offer a supportive environment while "our drama club is our only sort of younger, under 12s kind of age group." All of that changed early in 2020.



Prevented from the normal centre-based practice of drop-ins and organised groups, The Ripple Youth Work Team were keen to reach out and support young people, and began a new approach of initiating contact with young people in local streets and parks. Youth Scotland provided support during the implementation of this new approach with advice and toolkits, as well as various training sessions including Online Engagement, Issue-based workshops and, more recently, support in Reopening Indoor Youth Work. They also benefitted from Youth Scotland's kitbag of sport and games equipment. A further crucial element was that Generation CashBack support enabled the purchase of branded staff uniforms (hoodies, jackets, ID badges), giving The Ripple a clear visual outdoor presence, along with the purchase of a project mobile phone as a point of contact for young people.

A new approach

Staff described how lockdown required them to perform their roles differently and promote the project in new ways.

"You became a bit of a detached youth worker overnight... you have to take your youth work skills and implement them outside and see how that can build up... and it has been very successful..." (Tuesday)

"We got wee Ripple business cards made... they could take it home and show their parents and they could follow our Facebook and things like that, so they can keep up to date when clubs are back on or when we're out and stuff. And they've been really well received. Which is brilliant, the kids go 'I'm gonna get my mum to like that page' and stuff, which has been really nice to hear." (Danielle)

Renewed community visibility and impact

Being out in the community and wearing uniforms purchased through Generation CashBack support, has had a valuable impact on The Ripple's profile, its support of young people, community relationships and future work:

Identify and presence: "It gives us that opportunity to actually be able to go out and do some outdoor stuff as well. Because we're not just going to be randoms on the street, we've got the uniforms, we can go out, we can do more stuff." (Danielle)

Consultation: "By the October break we should've spoken to enough young people to kind of have a cohort up at Craigentenny, to know what kind of things they want to do." (Danielle)

Awareness among young people: "So the young people that don't know us, that don't come to our groups, it's been good because obviously we've introduced ourselves... you're all dressed the same, and they know straight away you're from somewhere. Because you've all got the same hoodies on, the same jackets and stuff, so it's great, you can go up and they talk away to you and they'll say to you 'oh I know what the hub is' and you go 'oh do you, have you ever been to the hub' and that starts the conversation straight away, and you can tell them what clubs are on and stuff. So it's getting The Ripple name out there, it's getting it a bit of publicity for the group for when we do start back... And a good few of the kids have already been like 'oh I would love to come to that club' so that's brilliant." (Danielle)

Profile-raising in the community: "People come up and say 'oh I've seen yous about in the street' and things like 'what are you all about?'. One of the parents said 'I've always wondered what are yous doing'. I explained, and she went 'that's fantastic'... it just shows you the impact that a uniform can have..." (Tuesday)

Ideas for the future: "I'm quite keen to try and get some more of that up and running once everything's settled a wee bit more. So I think, just having the uniform will always set us in good stead... it's just a good thing to have. Now we've not got an excuse not to go out. We've got the uniform, we've got the kitbags, let's get out... let's go to where young people are." (Danielle)



“ I’m really proud that we are still doing something, we’re still trying to reach out to them...”

Activities creating and building relationships

Along with the outreach approach, outdoor activities using sports equipment provided by Youth Scotland have been used as a way to bring young people together, but they are also providing important opportunities for support.

“We’ll say to them on social media, we were going to meet, and hopefully we’ll find them there, and we’ll just say you know ‘do you fancy a game of football’ or whatever, rounders or something...so that they’re not just walking the streets.” (Tuesday)

“Workers have seen about twenty to fifty kids, and they’re getting good contact, they’re getting good socialising, and they’re having a joke and a laugh.” (Danielle)

“... Building up a trust with some of the kids is so hard, because you’re breaking down barriers, some of the kids have had it really hard or they don’t really communicate very well...” [our message is] “you can trust us, we’re not going to let you down... we still want to see you, we still want to talk to you, we still want to make sure you’re alright, you’re safe.” (Tuesday)

During lockdown, The Ripple project staff attended Youth Scotland training designed to help maintain engagement such as an introduction to Zoom. More recently, sessions on Reopening Indoor Youth Work and Development Worker support on reopening the project’s Buddying Network have been invaluable. While there are new ways of running reopened groups, the reaction has been positive.

“I think I pretty much attended nearly every bit of training that was offered... I like Youth Scotland training, it’s really good. I like the way they run it, it’s very much ‘you take part... the more you take part in it, the more you’ll get from it... that’s the way I learn more, so for me it’s useful.” (Danielle)

“They have been social distancing and they’re quite enjoying it, they’ve been using it more as a game and doing the whole two metre thing... They’re seeing it more and more each week as they come as a bit of fun and a bit of a game, and like ‘what’s my temperature?’... which I think is good, because as much as the Covid is serious, let us see the fun side a wee bit too, being in the building, yes we’re taking it serious... but we can still be here and we can still enjoy ourselves, which is nice.” (Danielle)

“I really like their award stuff... we’ve got three kids that have done [Youth Scotland] Hi5 Awards whilst we were in lockdown. They were just doing some art and they were doing that anyway. I love that kind of stuff, because I think it’s so easy to follow, it’s absolutely brilliant, and they really simplify it for young people so that they really are getting it for doing something that they’re already doing.” (Danielle)

“They [young people] seemed to be chuffed with things like that [Youth Scotland Hi5 Awards] so, it’s just nice to get recognised for something that you’re doing and you’re quite good at.” (Danielle)

Solid foundations for the future

While not a straightforward transition, staff have found reward in trying the new approach and seeing positive results and advice, training and resources from Youth Scotland have all played a part.

“That’s part of your job as a youth worker, you have to adapt... I must admit, at first I was a bit disheartened, but now I love it... I’m really proud that we are still doing something, we’re still trying to reach out to them... I’d much rather be going out walking the streets, and if I didn’t get a kid then I’ve tried my best...” (Tuesday)

Overall, the project has succeeded in remaining open for business, getting out into the local community, trialling new approaches, and safely restarting indoor work which was further supported by Youth Scotland advice and training, when the opportunity arose.

“The fact that we’re still open in the pandemic, is massive... that we’re still reaching out to all different ages... trying and making sure that every child is getting, almost catered for in the sense, that they’re not getting lost in the system.” (Tuesday)



“With the virus, it’s really hit the teenagers, and they can’t come into the centre, so you’ve got to have something else...” (Tuesday)

Enthusiasm of the Edge

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Youth Scotland is the largest national youth work organisation in Scotland, supporting 82,571 young people, 1,730 youth groups and over 9,397 youth workers. Reflective of a national youth work organisation, their work is highly varied but centred on one goal – achieving better outcomes for young people. This is achieved through a combination of activities that includes supporting and working with their membership, delivering different programmes and projects, and providing training and events for the sector. They also have a range of awards available to young people that recognises and accredits their achievements.

In March 2021, Youth Scotland brought four Edinburgh-based youth work organisations together to participate in an Action Learning Set (ALS). This event was titled ‘Enthusiasm of the Edge’, reflecting that many young people view themselves as being on the edge and the enthusiasm of youth workers to engage with these young people.

The ALS was designed to provide practitioners with the time and space to discuss issues and challenges youth workers face. It also offered an opportunity to draw on peers’ experience, practice, and ideas to identify steps to minimise or overcome those challenges and deliver the best possible outcomes for the young people and families they work with.

Youth work organisations who participated in Enthusiasm of the Edge are all Youth Scotland/ LAYC member groups and have had a long-standing relationship with Youth Scotland. This includes their involvement in the Stand Up to Sectarianism and Generation CashBack programmes, which have been pivotal in identifying the opportunity and need for the ALS. The organisations were:

- **MYDG:** Based in North Edinburgh, MYDG work with communities in Muirhouse and the surrounding areas to provide opportunities and support that make a positive difference to young people and their families.
- **Pilton Youth and Children’s Project (PYCP):** Based in Pilton, PYCP work with over 450 children

and young people, offering new experiences and providing support to overcome any issues and challenges, giving young people the best chance of a successful future.

- **Ferrywell Youth project:** This youth work organisation supports young people across Pilton, Muirhouse and Drylaw. Staff and volunteers work alongside other organisations and agencies to deliver support for young people to live healthy and positive lives.
- **Passion4Fusion:** Working across Edinburgh and the Lothians, Passion4Fusion is a black and minority ethnic (BME) organisation that aims to empower and advance active participation of diverse ethnic minorities in all aspects of society and address inequalities and gaps in support for BME communities.

Following the ALS, participating organisations were allowed to bid for additional funding of up to £750, supported by Generation CashBack, to enable learning from the ALS to be applied and support follow-on work from the day. This additional

funding reflects Youth Scotland’s recognition that long term investment and support is what the sector needs and acknowledges the long term commitment that youth work organisations make in forming trusting relationships with the young people they work with and the communities they are part of.

This first ALS was a pilot to test the value of the approach and the opportunity it provided for youth work organisations to discuss challenges and draw on the experiences and ideas of their peers. It has been seen as a success by those in attendance, and Youth Scotland plans to replicate the approach with the next ALS to involve organisations operating in Glasgow.

This short report presents the main themes of discussion at the ALS and follow-up interviews with ALS participants. It covers delivery formats and interventions, approaches that create change, challenges in delivering youth work, young people’s emerging needs in the pandemic, and the impact of youth work.

Each participant described the activities, opportunities, and delivery formats they use to engage and support young people. These included a combination of the following:



Group work



Residential care



Outdoor activities,
sports, arts and crafts



One to one support



Trips away



Education, awards
and development
opportunities
(formal and informal)



Volunteering and
employment support



Housing support



Advocacy and
representation



**Supporting school
transition**

While the different components are essential, they don't tell the whole story. The thought and purpose behind all these activities and delivery formats create the conditions for providing support and driving positive change.



Relationships

“ Those are the situations where young people will trust their youth worker, as probably one of the few adults they trust. So it’s a hugely privileged position to be in.”

Youth work organisations place relationships and trust at the heart of their approach. Participants explained that this is key to working effectively with young people and providing the support and opportunities they need. Positive relationships based on mutual trust enable open and honest discussions with young people. They are the route to understanding young people’s circumstances and perspectives, the challenges they face, and their support needs.

Safe space

“ It creates a safe space for them to come, but then also for them to get that support that they might need.”

The importance of giving young people a safe space was discussed. This means creating an environment where young people feel comfortable talking about anything without fear of judgement, can hang out with friends and just have a bit of fun. Safe spaces were also described as places where young people would feel like other people cared about them, showed them love, and believed in them and what they could do.

Listening

“ Even if it’s just sat on the bus on the way to a trip, you hear their chat, you’ll hear about what they have been up to. It gives you the chance to start talking about some of that, looking at why it is happening. Not judging or condemning, having an open chat about it.”

One participant highlighted the value of group-based activities in identifying support needs or creating opportunities to discuss concerns. Being around young people, observing and listening will often flag something that a youth worker can explore with the young people/person. This helps them to identify and address any issues or challenge choices and behaviour.

Broadening horizons and increasing aspirations

“ Some of these lads haven’t even been outside of their own areas; we’re showing them new things, giving them a taste of what else is out there.”

While residentials, trips and activities give young people opportunities for fun and the space to enjoy themselves, these events are viewed as having an additional value by youth workers. They provide young people with new experiences, let them see new places, and give them opportunities to try things they have not had the chance to do before. These opportunities help young people discover and develop skills and strengths, showing them options and a different path they can follow.



Diversionary activity

“ It’s more than just giving them stuff to do.”

One participant reflected that a lot of youth work delivery could be classed as diversionary activity. However, they emphasised that although they provide young people with opportunities to engage in positive activities, this needs to be more than ‘stuff to do’. These activities create spaces to listen and understand, to give advice and support, to push and encourage. It is about showing the young people that there is a different, better path for them.

Being there

“ It’s being everything for that young person at that time, you’re the one they look to if they have a problem with anything.”

For some young people, youth workers are the one reliable, constant adult presence in their lives and the only one there when the young people needs them. Participants discussed how it can take a lot for a young person to ask for help or raise a highly personal issue. What the young person needs at that point is for that worker to be there for them, support them, and be alongside them.

One organisation described it as ‘being everything for that young person at that time’. They explained that if a young person approaches them about financial difficulties, for example, they don’t want to hear that the youth worker will contact another organisation that will support them. They are looking to the youth worker as the person they trust to support them in the best way possible. Through the discussion, examples were given of youth workers attending funerals with young people when they have lost someone close to them, attending the police station at three o’clock in the morning to act as their responsible adult, and supporting young people to find accommodation when they have lost their home. Youth workers feel a responsibility not to let their young people down.



Challenges of working with other agencies and services

Almost all participants described issues related to rigidity and lack of flexibility in statutory services that engage with the young people they support. This presents a stark contrast to the adaptability and flexibility adopted by youth work organisations to ensure that they can best meet the needs of young people. One described this as the difference between being service-led – expecting young people and their needs to fit with a rigid service – and needs-led, where the service is tailored to the young person’s situation and circumstances. The challenge that youth work organisations are left to wrestle with is how to influence system change.

A lack of genuine partnership working was described, where all organisations and agencies involved in a young person’s life work together to achieve the best possible outcome for the young person. Participants reflected that there was a much more joined-up approach 6 or 7 years ago but has become fragmented in recent years. Youth work organisations are often excluded from multi-agency meetings where discussions about the young people they work with take place and decide what is best for them. They felt this does young people a disservice, providing an incomplete picture of the individual. In contrast, often, youth workers can fill many of the gaps through the relationships they have developed and insight they have gained about the young people and their families. Each organisation involved has part of the story, but youth workers questioned how the best decisions could be taken about a young person unless all are involved.

There were, however, examples of the good work that can happen when true partnership working is in place. One participant described increased dialogue with senior staff in a school they work with, which opened discussion about what their organisation can do to support student mental health and wellbeing. Instead of education driving everything, they have encouraged the school to listen to the support youth workers can offer. Aligned to this, and in keeping with the importance that youth work organisations place on relationships, there were also examples of positive relationships with individuals in other services. While these relationships can produce effective working and collaboration to best meet the needs of young people, achieving this as common practice across the system remains the challenge.



Reduced social work capacity

There is a sense amongst youth work organisations that they are picking up and addressing many of the issues and support needs that would normally be expected of social work. A gradual decline in the number of social workers serving the north of Edinburgh was highlighted, though no reduction in need. Participants reflected this has resulted in social workers having unmanageable caseloads or limited time to devote to any single person or family. This affects the relationship that social workers can develop and the depth of understanding that they can generate. Social workers may perceive that young people are not engaging with them, but it reflects the lack of a trust-based relationship being formed.

Understanding and recognition

The lack of understanding of youth work and what it achieves was discussed as a significant barrier. There is a perception that statutory partners view youth work as 'running little youth clubs and doing fun activities' without understanding the valuable work taking place, the relationships being developed, the support provided, and the development of life and social skills. Participants suggested that other agencies do not see the value in what they do and the difference they make to young people, families, communities and other services.

Youth workers expressed frustration at not being understood by the different professions they engage with on behalf of and for young people. They want to be working with people who understand what they are doing, recognise its value and understand how youth work supports other services.

Participants acknowledged this misconception is not shared by everyone across different agencies. They observed a difference when working with those who value and understand what they do and recognise them as critical people in a young person's life. Understanding leads to more productive partnership working and a greater collaborative approach to supporting young people.

BME engagement with support and services

A specific challenge raised by one organisation was a lack of relationship building with black and minority ethnic families by all support services, including youth work. The organisation reflected that BME families had not been adequately integrated into what is already available and happening in the area. While they acknowledged the services exist, the awareness and trust amongst young people and their families to access are lacking. The organisation stressed the need to engage the parents first and build trust with them, which in turn would lead to young people engaging with the support and activities available. This, it was suggested, requires more than just sending a leaflet; it is about proper connection and relationship building. It needs organisations to be proactive, invest the time required to do this and work alongside the organisations that are successfully working with minority ethnic families.

There was much discussion about the level and type of needs that young people will have once lockdown was lifted and things start getting back to normal. The level of demand and the severity of need is expected to increase.

Mental health

“ From chatting to our young people and parents, we know that more and more young people are needing support with their mental health, and we expect this will only increase.”

Over the past year, youth work organisations have observed a rise in mental health and wellbeing support needs. This is expected to continue, with a pronounced spike in demand anticipated. Organisations see the lack of structure and routine, changes to sleeping habits and activity, a lack of self-care, isolation and online bullying as contributing factors.

Engagement with school

“ The sad thing is there are some 3rd years we are working with that won't go back [to school]. That's it, they just won't go back. A crucial point for them, and what happens to them, who is picking them up?”

A participant raised a fear that some young people will not re-engage with school at all. They have been disengaged for so long throughout lockdown that there is a fundamental disinterest in school among some young people that they simply won't go back. While school attendance and attainment are not a

direct responsibility for youth work organisations, they want the best for young people. They worry that a lack of engagement with school leads to further issues that young people will need support with.

Whole family approach

“ Sometimes, you are the bridge between that young person and their family.”

An increase in intensive whole family support and one to one support for young people was reported by one organisation. These interventions are often crisis-led rather than at a preventative point which can avoid a crisis. While they are 'youth' workers, there is recognition that they also play the role of family support worker – they need to address some family issues because of their influence on a young person's behaviour.

Criminality and anti-social behaviour

“ What we are noticing now is, during lockdown, there are more instances of anti-social behaviour, vandalism, younger ones getting involved, and we're speaking to parents that are getting visits from CID.”

Anti-social behaviour and criminal activity are not new to youth work organisations, but there have been increased instances and severity. Examples

discussed by participants included drug use and drug dealing of high level and concerning 'harder' drugs, car thefts, throwing stones at buses and a wide range of less severe but unwanted risky and anti-social behaviour. Generation CashBack has been supporting these groups to be able to tackle anti-social behaviour with their youth groups and the wider community.

Checking in, hanging out

“ We've adapted, we've been very responsive in our approach to things, to keep them engaged.”

Over the past year, youth work organisations have not been able to provide the same opportunities and support to young people they work with. However, true to their ethos, they have adapted and been proactive to maintain engagement. This has included delivering activity packs to the doors of younger children they support, using calls, texts and social media to check in and sending cards out saying they are thinking of them. With the lighter nights coming, detached youth work has been utilised to meet the young people where they are, hanging out with their friends, and letting them know that they are still there for them.



The unknown

“ The landscape is going to be vast. We know mental health is going to be a big issue, we know some of the key themes we are looking at, but I guess we won't know some of the themes that will develop organically until we get young people back into that space.”

There is recognition of high levels of anticipated demand for youth work services in the coming months, with one organisation describing it as 'a tsunami of issues coming'. While youth work organisations have been closest to the young people throughout the lockdowns and seen first-hand the challenges faced and support needs, there is a belief that needs will emerge that have not been predicted or expected.

Re-engagement

“ We need to re-engage with the kids. Some of the kids we would see all the time during the week, we've not heard from, we've not seen.”

Youth work organisations have been proactive in maintaining engagement and supporting the young people they work with, but some have dropped off the radar. A small number of young people have struggled with engagement during lockdown, and whether it will be possible to re-engage them in the future is unknown. There is uncertainty about what things will look like when normal service resumes.

The need for joined-up working

“ We'll do as much as we can, but we need to be realistic; we won't be able to pick up on everything – it leads to anxiety, who are we going to miss?”

As much as youth workers have made extensive efforts to support young people, there is recognition that young people have not been receiving all the support they need. This is not solely about youth work but reflective of support across the entire system, creating a sense that youth work organisations will be overwhelmed when things open back up.

Youth work organisations acknowledge that they cannot be the sole source of support for young people who live 'on the edge'. Partnership approaches are needed to find solutions. However, there is a concern that some statutory organisations have not seen what young people have been dealing with and the intensity of support that will be required. Therefore, they may not recognise how vital it is that all parts of the system work in a collaborative and joined-up way.

Ability to adapt

“ We take young people on their own journey, everyone is different.”

Participants spoke about their services never being a 'one size fits all'. Instead, everything they do is youth-led and specific to the young people involved. To effectively meet their needs, young people need to be the priority and the focus. This requires an adaptable and flexible approach, which has become the norm for youth work organisations.



When discussing the difference that youth work makes, organisations unsurprisingly focused on the young people and families they work with. One organisation summed it up as supporting young people onto a better path than they would be otherwise – not a perfect path, but a better one.

Through the relationships they develop, the supportive environment that workers create, and the sustained nature of their involvement, youth workers see first-hand the changes young people make. This could be what young people are doing in their communities, the people they hang around with and their general attitude and outlook. For some, it is a gradual shift over a long period; for others the change is significant and comes quickly.

Youth work organisations acknowledge that not every young person has a success story; some young people they work with do not achieve the outcomes hoped. While it is disappointing and frustrating, it is the reality of the work they do. That said, across their many successes, the following were cited as the most common positive impacts:

- Providing a space for young people where they are listened to, respected and valued
- Give them someone they can trust and depend on
- Educate and develop skills that they won't learn anywhere else
- Help them to see their strengths and potential
- Broaden horizons, increase aspirations and self-belief
- Enable them to think about life beyond school and support them into college, employment, independent living
- Change perceptions of young people through community projects and volunteering

- Provide hope, meaning and a sense of purpose
- Fun and enjoyment
- Showing them different routes to get what they want (alternatives to crime)
- A sense of pride and achievement
- Improve family relationships

While there are concerns about what the future holds and what these organisations can expect in the coming weeks and months, staff from organisations that participated in the ALS see the potential in every young person they work with. They firmly believe that many more young people can find their path to a positive and productive future with the right dedicated support structures in place.

Ongoing support from Youth Scotland/ LAYC means that going forward the organisations that participated in the ALS will continue to get the information, resources and training they need to help address some of the issues identified. The Generation CashBack and Stand Up programmes are in a position to offer targeted, follow-on support to these groups and will ensure that the dialogue remains open and that all benefit from the ongoing knowledge-exchange within the network.

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