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Getting ready for youth work

Youth Scotland offers a wide range of continuous professional learning and training for youth workers, volunteers and leaders. Ready for Youth Work (RFYW) is the first step on Youth Scotland's Accredited Learning Pathway. The course has six modules: Introduction to Youth Work, Introduction to Hi5 and Dynamic Youth Awards, Child Protection Awareness, Leading Games and Creative Evaluation, Introduction to Youth Participation, and Emergency First Aid Awareness. It can be delivered online, in person, as e-learning and is accredited with an SCQF Level 3 qualification.

In this case study Maham, Dawn, David and Emily from YMCA Kilmarnock share their experiences of Ready for Youth Work in late 2024. YMCA Kilmarnock primarily offers youth programmes for those aged 5-17 but also runs a community café, a community garden and a drop in for older adults. Their youth programme runs every night of the week at no cost to families. As Youth Scotland members, YMCA Kilmarnock can access Ready for Youth Work and a range of other training free of charge.





The main idea is to provide services to young people and to empower them and give them a safe space where they can express themselves and also learn and develop personally.



A busy youth programme

YMCA Kilmarnock was founded in 1904 and has been providing vital services for the community ever since. Currently they support 40 young people each week through the youth programme and this number is expected to increase significantly at their upcoming Easter holiday project. During the week they offer young people a different activity every evening.

"The main idea is to provide services to young people and to empower them and give them a safe space where they can express themselves and also learn and develop personally."

"On Mondays, we have Moving Mondays. It's all about sports. On Tuesdays, it's tech and arts and crafts. On Wednesdays it's arts and baking. Thursday is all about tech and they play different games and learn about technology. And on Fridays, we have funky Fridays where young people come in and we give them a choice of what they want to do."

Uniting as a staff and volunteer team

Emily is a trainee youth worker, Dawn and David are volunteers and Maham is a Youth and Community Worker. Emily, David and Dawn have all been involved with the YMCA for years and Maham started in summer 2024. They all had different reasons for getting into youth work but they are united in their passion for supporting young people.

"I am the trainee youth worker... I started volunteering at YMCA two years ago and then I got a job as a paid member of staff. When I was in school about two years ago, I got referred to start volunteering because I was quite shy and anxious - school wasn't the best for me - so I got referred [to YMCA], started doing the nights and then did my first summer. I've had so many youth workers in my time like from school and stuff and I always said if I could be half of what they are, like that's a win for me."

"I'm a volunteer and I've been here for two and a half year. It's been really good. It's really helped me mentally like to get back out there and do what I love because I used to work in a nursery but then I stopped work for six years to look after my kids... And I came here and fell in love with the place and now don't want to leave."

"Young people are the next generation and we really need to invest into our future. We need to make sure that all the young people are able to develop - they all have potential, that's what I believe in. But they just don't all have the right space or the right environment where they could express themselves."



The changes we see in our young people who come in is amazing. You can see they have started to be happy and they feel like they can speak to us...



Responding to needs in the community

The need for accessible youth activities in Kilmaronock is clear to the team. Levels of poverty in the local community are high and families can't always afford to access other youth provision that has a cost attached. There are also challenges with older young people getting involved in underage drinking.

"If we talk about Kilmaronock as a community, it's one of the top areas which is poverty stricken in Scotland... most of the services that are around in this area, you need to pay for. So lots of young people who are coming into our service, they didn't have the opportunity to go anywhere elsewhere to find out their talent and many of them were even hesitant to come in because it's really difficult to start interacting socially when you haven't had the platform of a safe space before."

"We offer them a safe space. They get to develop social skills, language skills, like some kids might come in and be really shy and not speak but then when they start coming out of their shell and they listen to all the other kids talking then they might start speaking a bit as well. They're getting to be active. And most of all, they get to have fun."

"You know it is hard with teenagers because... they like drinking in Killie. A lot when they get to a certain age, they start drinking and we start losing them. And we're just trying to figure out how to get them in in and no drinking."

"The changes we see in our young people who come in is amazing. You can see they have started to be happy and they feel like they can speak to us, like they've created that bond with somebody other than their parents."

"I worked closely one-to-one with a child that has got additional support needs and I have really seen this child develop over the past two years I've been working with them. It's quite an eye-opening experience and it made me realise this is what I want to do full time for a living."

Identifying a need for training

The YMCA Kilmaronock team have different levels of youth work experience, but they all felt that Ready for Youth Work would be a useful course.

"To be fair, I did feel confident. But I used to work in a nursery, so I'm used to working really structured. I realised that I need to change the way that I deliver, I needed to get used to being able to try to adapt and be a bit more chilled. I needed a better understanding of how I should present myself in a youth work session. That's why I did Ready for Youth Work."

"My confidence was certainly not great to begin with. Starting as the gardener for the community garden, I just wasn't that used to being around kids and playing games. But now I can come in, sit down and actually play with Barbies with kids!"

"I moved from Pakistan, I didn't know the dynamics of youth work over here. I wanted to learn more about youth work in Scotland."

"Before sessions I was getting quite nervous because I was like some of these children are like a couple of years younger than me. So I wanted to build confidence delivering to groups."



It really helped me to explore the new horizons and how I could develop my sessions around the youth that we are supporting...



Valuable lessons in youth work

The team took part in different formats of the Ready for Youth Work course. Dawn and David completed an online course, Maham attended an in-person course in Glasgow and Emily did one in Falkirk. Certain aspects of the course stood out to each of them.

"It really helped me to explore the new horizons and how I could develop my sessions around the youth that we are supporting... These two days training really gave me the confidence to draft all my sessions according to how the young people are in Kilmarnock. And I really did that confidently after I took the two days training."

"Doing the training helped me so much because I'm trained in a nursery. So it's a different way of teaching the kids and I learnt a lot from it. It helped me see things differently. I learned a lot through the youth work framework because I never like knew about it before. Obviously, I've worked with the Curriculum for Excellence before but I never realised there was an actual full framework around youth work so I learned a lot from that."

"We had sessions on what the rules and laws are and the legislations that exist for youth [work] over here in Scotland. So this was something that really gave me the confidence to actually align all my goals and objectives for the session and the young people all together."

"The games were great. I was able to make up games for my kids garden club - games involving the garden. That was hard to make before. I'm 35, so the last games I was played [before the course] was like 20 years ago!"

"For me, it was about the Hi5 Awards and Dynamic Youth Awards because now we know that we could actually do that for all the journeys of the young people who are coming in and make each of their achievements recognised at the right place."



Keeping children and young people safe

While the YMCA Kilmarnock team had been trained in child protection procedures before, they all agreed that it was useful to have a refresher.

"It's really helping us with reporting and of course supporting the young people for follow-ups if anything happens which we think might be a child protection concern. So that really has helped all of us. Being more mindful and being aware. As staff, we now feel confident to have meetings and discuss things that we feel that we need to do differently for child protection."

"Yeah, obviously we done it before, but it brought it back to the front of your mind. It made you think about it again... It made me want to go refresh myself over our policy."



I think the training that we took really helped us to align all the things personally and professionally as well.



High quality training

The YMCA Kilmarnock team enjoyed getting to know their Youth Scotland trainers and felt well supported by them.

"I had Joshua, he was very enthusiastic and he was good at keeping us engaged, especially because it was online. It was my very first Zoom call I'd ever done because I don't do these kind of calls but after doing that course, I'm confident enough to do this today, so I'm glad I had the experience to do a Zoom training."

"I find it difficult to speak in big groups and I was the only one from YMCA Kilmarnock and everyone else was from the same organisation! And they were all like a lot older than me. So I was just like the wee baby and I'm just sitting there... But Laura made me feel very included because sometimes I know what I want to say but I can't word it in my head because I've got dyslexia so like it's sometimes very difficult but she was very good in understanding and helping me."

"It was amazing meeting them... I connected with Laura and Kobi after that as well because we were thinking that we might have any sessions like customised training or workshops just particularly for the YMCA Kilmarnock team. Our young people have so much potential but they just don't have the right opportunities."

A lasting impact on the team

The team reflected on what they have taken from Ready for Youth Work that has had a lasting impact on their practice.

"If it wasn't for the youth work training, I wouldn't have had the confidence to plan the kids garden club - it's starting in April! As the only youth worker with gardening skills, I needed to come up with it all by myself. From Ready for Youth Work, I planned each month of garden club starting with garden safety and then doing things for different seasons. I'm happier. A miracle. And I like the kids, man!"

"We have aligned all our sessions according to the [youth work] outcomes and we see that each activity leads to which outcome and which subheadings of the outcomes that they are achieving through it. So this has really helped our session plans."

"We have made our session plans around it [Hi5 and Dynamic Youth Awards] so that we ensure that each person gets to achieve something so that really helped me plan them."

"I think the training that we took really helped us to align all the things personally and professionally as well. With whatever we're doing over here and over here all of us are on the same page and we're trying to just give young people as many areas as possible where they could excel and develop."

"Before I went on the course, I felt as though I couldn't really run a session - like lead a session - by myself because we had other youth workers and I felt as though I kept going to them because I was just not confident in myself because before I got this job, I was just specialising doing the one-to-ones with the young people that have got ASN. So I feel also my confidence in my youth work side has really skyrocketed!"



Some kids have disabilities, so they can't go to clubs like gymnastics or something, but they can come here.



The impact on the young people

Alongside speaking to the staff and volunteers at YMCA Kilmarnock, we also spoke to two young people who attend the service, aged 10 and 11. They were both excited to talk about all the different things they love about YMCA Kilmarnock. First, they listed their favourite activities.

- "Arts and crafts, and outside, and gaming."
- "In arts and crafts I made wizard cats. I love cats."
- "I get to see all my friends."

They also had other reasons that they like attending.

- "I have lots of friends here."
- "They give us drinks and support us and make sure we're all right. And if we are hungry, they give us something to eat."
- "We get to get time away from our parents and not get in trouble 24-7."

They had mixed opinions about school, and felt it was important to have YMCA Kilmarnock as somewhere else they could spend time and make friends.

- "I mean, [school] it's quite... it's a medium for me. I took five points away for homework. Teachers are very annoying, and in here [the YMCA] we're calm and safe."
- "It's different from school because you actually know people properly and you get to actually play with them."

There were also things they felt they learnt at YMCA Kilmarnock that they didn't learn in school, including ways of supporting other young people.

- "How to not get annoyed."
- "If there's a brand new person, go up to them and say hi and act nice. I go up to them. Say, hi, do you want to come and join in our group?"

The young people were full of compliments for their youth workers! They agreed that the staff were good at supporting them, and that they helped them to learn new skills. They also said they would feel safe to talk to them if something was upsetting them.

- "If someone was being mean to me I would talk to them [YMCA youth workers]. Or if someone was bullying another person."

They also mentioned a few other reasons that YMCA Kilmarnock is important.

- "Some kids have disabilities, so they can't go to clubs like gymnastics or something, but they can come here."
- "It's good for people that don't have that much money. It doesn't cost anything to come here."



The network
of youth groups

Find out more about how to
access Ready for Youth Work
(RFYW) in-person, online and
as e-learning on our website at:

[www.youthscotland.org.uk/
ready-for-youth-work](http://www.youthscotland.org.uk/ready-for-youth-work)



Plans for the future

The YMCA Kilmarnock team have ambitious plans for the future and ideas for new projects to support young people. They have also taken part in further Youth Scotland training, and plan to do more.

"I did the Mental Health Matters training. To be fair it was quite a personal thing for me. Because of stuff that I've been through. It made me understand things better like I've been able to understand why kids sometimes behave the way they do. And Julie, she was fantastic doing it as well, she was great."

"We've got a great space and it's amazing here. We just want to market it out properly so we can have more young people come in... And of course, for now we have a certain age group, a lot of the young people are in P7 and younger, so we're trying to do more outreach with older kids as well. I want to start an older kids youth club from 13 to age of 16 or 18 where the main idea would be to do social projects in their own communities."

"I want to run an ASN group on a Saturday. Because I feel as though when everyone else is like going to football or going to dancing or whatever I want to have a safe space where these kids can develop and come out their shell. So that's my goal for the next like year hopefully."

All of the team want to progress onto the Professional Development Award (PDA) in Youth Work – the next step on Youth Scotland's accredited training pathway.

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