

Local Youth Groups Today

The Value, the Challenge, the Opportunity



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About UK Youth

UK Youth have been working to better the lives of young people for 105 years, and our experience is second to none.

Through our network of youth development organisations across the UK, we empower over 700,000 young people to take control of their own lives with the support, encouragement and opportunities they need to help them reach their full potential and grow into confident, capable adults who lead fulfilling lives.

In 2014/15 we reached 729,694 young people, 68,583 of whom took part in our innovative programmes, gained accreditation or attended our outdoor learning centre at Avon Tyrrell. Our mission is to work with youth organisations across the UK to give young people the support and tools they need for life, work and a better future.

We achieve our mission through innovative and inspiring national programmes delivered by an extensive network of 'Youth Hubs' large and small across the length and breadth of the country. These 'Youth Hubs' are run by community-based youth groups and outreach organisations, with infrastructure support from UK Youth.

Find out more at : www.ukyouth.org

About ClearView Research

ClearView Research is a leading-edge youth-led consultancy. We provide specialist advice and produce solution-focused reports.

Our goal is to create change through research by producing research that enlightens and empowers key stakeholders in society, particularly young people, marginalised communities and decision-makers. Our purpose lies in enabling them to solve the issues highlighted in our reports.

Unlike traditional research companies, we do not rely solely on desktop research, we take it a step further and conduct advanced social action research. We engage and work with the people in society that are not on your typical polling company's database and we believe it is vital that our researchers work with, and in many cases, co-create our reports with the same individuals, communities and groups in society, that are the focus of our research.

We pride ourselves in ensuring that our research is always: accessible, engaging and inclusive for a wide audience.

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Foreword by Chloe Smith MP



We all know the heroes of the youth sector who work so hard for young people and this report highlights the need that every MP can recognise, for high-quality, well-structured local youth projects.

It's not been easy times, the taxpayer has been able to do less and so we should be looking for excellent local examples, smart scaling, good use of public money, and outcomes that serve young people. In many cases, charities and community groups have stepped up imaginatively to be more efficient with what they've got, all to the benefit of young people.

There are still ways by which the Government can work with local areas to help deliver more with less. For example, the £10 million Uniformed Youth Social Action Fund has directed LIBOR fines from banks to enable over 15,000 more young people to join groups like the Scouts, Guides and Cadets.

We can build on this success by encouraging more young people to get involved with volunteering in their communities alongside peers, which we know helps to build the grit and resilience which employers look for later on.

I'm looking for one outcome in particular – that young people themselves should be hammering on the door of their council, asking for their interests to be balanced with other generations', and demonstrating that a long term view matters.

It's vital that young people are able to take pride in themselves and what they can achieve. Youth groups individually and UK Youth play a key role in this, and I am delighted to support them in this report and beyond.

Chloe Smith MP

First elected in 2009, Chloe is one of Britain's youngest MPs. She chairs the APPGs on Youth Employment, Youth Affairs and Democratic Participation, and was awarded both "Youth Friendly MP 2014" and "Grassroots Diplomat Initiative - Business Driver 2014".

Chloe chaired the National Youth Agency's Commission into Young People & Enterprise (2014-15) and was a commissioner on the Industry and Parliament Trust's Youth Skills Commission (2014-15). Locally, Chloe founded the Norwich for Jobs project, which has supported the halving of youth unemployment in Norwich.

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Executive Summary

The research that underpins this report was commissioned in response to the turmoil much of the youth sector finds itself in. Whilst there are fantastic, high impact youth projects happening all across the UK, there is also widespread concern that an increasing number of valuable services are losing support and funding.

Against the background of millions of pounds of reduced funding for local youth services, improved school outcomes, a focus on engaging young people in Social Action, and £1 billion to be committed to delivering the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme up to 2021, the role of local community based youth groups has become less clear.

So, is it time for the youth sector to accept that the needs of young people have changed so dramatically that the youth service we have built up for over a century is no longer fit for purpose? Should we recognise that new, alternative models of youth service provision are the way forward? Is it right to narrow the focus of commissioners, funders and the general public to concentrate targeted expenditure on a narrow range of programmes, so that outcomes can be carefully monitored and measured?

These, and others, are the questions we hoped to address through our research in order to help those involved in local youth provision better understand the current landscape and determine how to move forward.

In particular UK Youth sought to answer the question:

What is the role of local youth groups today?

What we found through our research was inspiring and heartening, but also cause for concern.

We were inspired to see that local youth clubs and projects across the UK (collectively referred to in this report as youth groups) perform a huge range of important roles, from giving vulnerable young people a safe place to go, through to delivering the National Citizen Service and providing employment advice.

It was heartening that, far from being empty spaces where ‘kids’ hang out and cause trouble, youth groups are a vital part of the social fabric in their local communities. Their role is constantly changing in order to keep pace with the needs of young people, residents, policy makers and funders.

Our concern stems from the increasing pace of change taking place at a grassroots level and the inability of many local groups, hampered by severe resource constraints, to adapt quickly enough to this new environment.

Local youth groups frequently operate on very small budgets, surviving from year to year, as most community based charities do, on a blend of fundraising, grants and social enterprise. They are typically run by a mix of paid youth workers and volunteers (though some may rely exclusively on one group or the other) and these staff show extremely high levels of dedication to the young people and the communities they serve.

Staff have traditionally been hired primarily on the basis of their ability to work effectively with young people, rather than their expertise in finance, business development, operations, or building management. As a result many now find themselves on a steep learning curve, determined to continue to support young people, but unsure where to go for training, support or funding.

We observed that central to all of this is the increasing need for local youth groups to articulate the impact of what they do. In the past it has been sufficient to make decisions about programme design and funding based predominantly on gut feeling and instinct. Indeed, when it comes to explaining why giving a young person a safe space, a hot meal and a listening ear is likely to improve their life chances as an adult, we should in many ways be able to rely on common sense to support the argument. None the less, more and more demands are being made on organisations to prove the value of what they do and, in an increasingly competitive funding environment, this pressure will only increase.

For small charities with limited resources this poses particular problems. In order to demonstrate that their organisation has a positive impact that is directly attributable to the work they do, it is necessary to have;

A clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve
A way of measuring whether or not they are achieving it
The ability to link outcomes back to the work of their organisation

This work is time consuming and costly, so many local youth groups struggle to engage with the process. As community based charities become increasingly reliant on volunteers this problem is likely to worsen. The onus is therefore on central government, national funders, infrastructure bodies and large scale delivery organisations to support local youth groups through this period of change. By providing infrastructure and guidance in order to establish consistency in our language and sector wide objectives, as well as enabling the sharing of good practice in order to learn and develop from each other, lead organisations in the sector can do some of the hard work for local groups. We have included some examples of this approach below:

A clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve of their organisation

The Cabinet Office's *Outcomes Frameworks: a guide for providers and commissioners of youth services*¹ summarises a number of frameworks that can be used by youth organisations to communicate what they are trying to achieve. There is also extensive advice available on how to develop a Theory of Change. The key here for local youth groups is 'less is more' – it is easy to get caught up in the complexity of a framework, when its real value lies in helping you to simplify what you do.

A way of measuring whether or not they are achieving it

For local youth groups this comes down to simple manual or IT systems to capture data on young people before, during and after their involvement with the group. The biggest hurdles here are a lack of IT skills among paid workers and volunteers, insufficient funding to invest in people and systems and inadequate time to do large scale data entry. The most cost effective way to tackle this would be via a national solution, rather than at a local level.

¹ Cabinet Office, 2014.

The ability to link outcomes back to the work of their organisation

To do this organisations need a clear understanding of the different categories of activity in which they are engaged. It is very hard to make a simple connection between an outcome and one of over thirty informal and non-formal activities you do with young people. The solution here is to group activities together using a common language that both delivery organisations and funders understand. In this report we have adopted the UK Youth Social Development Journey Framework to categorise activities under four main headings; Social Engagement, Social Learning, Social Action and Social Leadership. Local youth groups taking this approach will be able to articulate more clearly which elements of the work they do leads to which outcomes. Our hope is that this will make it easier for them to unlock new sources of support and funding.

If we can support individual local youth groups to explain their purpose then we can, by extension, explain the collective role of local youth groups today. With that purpose in mind, this report brings together case studies of individual youth groups in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. By bringing them together we hope to give you a flavor of the depth and breadth of activity they are engaged in and, in so doing, begin to illustrate the collective impact of community based youth work. Through this research we have also been able to identify good practice that already exists within local youth groups, that supports high quality delivery, impact assessment, and sustainability. This good practice has been brought together in the key findings and informed key priorities for national youth sector organisations and funders.

It is important to remember that local youth groups are one part of a much wider youth sector that includes a growing number of youth focused charities, social enterprises, uniformed youth organisations, sports clubs, employability programmes, citizenship and social action initiatives. This report does not seek to infer that local youth groups make up the youth sector in its entirety, but to highlight that they remain a vital part of it and often provide the linchpin linking multiple forms of youth sector provision together, through early intervention, identifying needs, and appropriate signposting into more targeted initiatives.

Our hope is that this report will achieve two things; firstly, public recognition of the great work that goes on in local youth groups, and secondly, to prompt positive action, locally and nationally, to support them and to ensure they remain.

The Value of Local Youth Groups

Youth Clubs appeared in the 1880's as separate provisions for boys and girls; they had evolved through the Ragged Schools and Sunday Schools movements. These early clubs had an emphasis on self-governance, a comprehensive curriculum of group activities from dancing to sport and self-education, they had libraries and arts and cultural clubs and were aimed at young people in employment.

The National Organisation of Girls Clubs (now UK Youth) was founded in 1911. The first mixed clubs appeared towards the end of the 1930s. Youth clubs meant mixed clubs but they worked on the same basis of activities, learning and self-government.



A club is neither a series of individuals attending a series of classes, a place for eternal billiards, dancing, and bean-bag hurling, nor is a club a club leader. A club is a community engaged in the task of educating itself.

Josephine Macalister Brew, In the Service of Youth, 1943



Through learning self-governance, club members were preparing to be responsible citizens in the wider community. By 1966, as Lesley Sewell wrote, the general aim of clubs affiliated to UK Youth (the then National Association of Youth Clubs) was 'to help girls and boys through their leisure time activities to develop their physical, mental and spiritual capacities that they may grow to full maturity as individuals and members of society'².

Today the skills acquired through participation in youth groups are more important than ever as employers struggle to fill vacancies as a result of applicants soft skill gaps. Development Economics Ltd (a research firm) estimates that over half a million UK workers will be significantly held back by soft skills deficits by 2020³.

² Sewell, L. 1966.

³ Development Economics Ltd. 2015.

“ Today, soft skills are worth over £88 billion in Gross Value Added to the UK economy each year, underpinning around 6.5% of the economy as a whole.

The Value of Soft Skills to the UK Economy, January 2015

”

Young people have access to an increasingly wide range of youth groups designed to help them develop what are variously referred to as soft skills, practical skills, character skills, socio-emotional skills or life skills. These organisations are typically founded on good youth work principles around voluntary participation, youth led design, peer to peer education and mentoring, and delivery of services at a time and location designed to meet the young person's needs. The approach each organisation takes will vary to reflect their geographic location, the needs and preferences of the young people in their area, and the resources available, but these underlying principles remain constant.

Modern youth groups make a valuable contribution to society and have a positive impact on the lives of young people, supporting them to become self-aware, receptive, resilient, self-assured, informed and driven so they can succeed in life and access employment⁴. These skills open up opportunities that might otherwise be closed to them, and enables the next generation to contribute to our society and the economy.

“ We are consistently reminded by our members that... skills such as leadership, teamwork and enterprise are the kind of qualities that young people develop through taking an active part in their local communities.

*Iain McMillan, Director CBI Scotland*⁵

”

The development of life skills is part of a broader remit for youth groups to prepare young people for adult life; encouraging them to take an interest in the wider world, be responsible for their own actions, give back to the community and determine a positive future for themselves and those around them.

⁴ Impetus Private Equity Foundation. 2014.

⁵ Youth Scotland. 2011.

“ They are the citizens of tomorrow, and to them the community has a double responsibility. Firstly, to provide each one of them with the possibilities of full and harmonious development, and secondly, to try to ensure that they are fitted to be members of the community of the future.

Josephine Macalister Brew, UK Youth's Educational Secretary⁶ ”

It is the transformational effect of this work that typically motivates youth workers and volunteers, and inspires them to dedicate long hours and vast reserves of emotional energy to what they do, often with little public recognition or reward in return.

“ Most people who work in youth clubs do so for the reward of the change they bring to the lives of young people.

Kenny Imafidon, ClearView Research ”

In this report we seek to lift the lid on modern day youth clubs and projects (collectively referred to in this report as youth groups) to share the work they do and the impact they have on young lives. It is clear from our visits to a wide range of local youth groups, from our online survey, and through conversations with youth workers, young people, their parents and key stakeholders, that community based youth organisations can have a positive transformative effect. This is particularly notable with regards to transitions to adulthood and at pivotal points in their lives such as the move from primary to secondary school.

“ ...friendships gained [at Callander Youth Project Trust], help with the transition into secondary school because in rural communities young people can be quite isolated. [The friendships] gained can often ease the transitional process, which lessens anxiety for pupils moving up to secondary.

Marc Fleming, Head Teacher, McLaren High School ”

Many of the stakeholders interviewed were positive about the ability of youth groups to have a long-term relationship with a young person, giving many examples of the impact this long-term engagement can have.

“ Youth clubs have young people with them for a long time [...] potentially between the ages of 8 to 25 and, because of this, youth clubs can help young people at different stages of their lives to help them reach their goals.

James Dellow, Youth & Innovation Manager, Dragon Hall Trust

”

We witnessed what James was talking about when we met Ryan from Granton Youth Centre. He told us he had been attending Granton from the age of 13 and that the club had supported him through his teenage years, through his prison sentence and now, at the age of 20, through his struggle to find employment. Youth clubs often provide the only constant in a young person's life, and it can take years before a young person recognises the value of this and starts to benefit from the support they have been given.



Youth clubs/groups support young people who are unable to access support elsewhere

96% respondents agreed

Survey responses to: 'Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements'

For some young people, a specific youth project that captures their imagination can provide a turning point and act as a catalyst to spur them onto success in other areas of their life.

“ I can't thank Wayne [Musician and Youth worker] enough for being one of those exceptions. I never would've got into any academy if it was not for Wayne. If I was not in the academy, I dread to think where I would be. [...] Wayne will motivate me to go my classes; he motivates me not just in music. I don't want people to think Wayne is just for music and then I have teachers. It is not like that. Wayne will always encourage me in my exams and things like that.

Julio, Participant, Andrew Kent Music Academy Youth Project

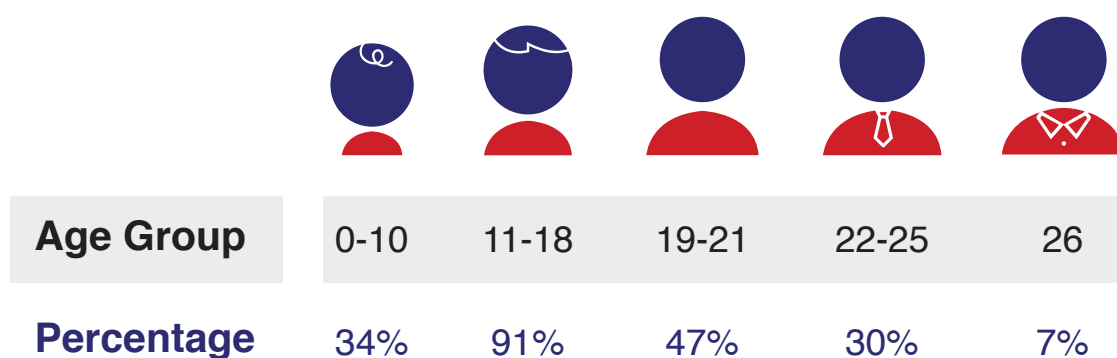
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The strength of the relationship between the young person and the youth worker enables many young people to feel comfortable returning to their youth groups after long periods of absence. Those we met who had been engaged with their youth club for a long time said they kept going because they were made to feel welcome, even if they only attended occasionally. They liked the fact that their youth club had an open door policy, so they were free to come and go as they wished. Youth groups recognise this need and many respond by tailoring programmes and activities to support specific life stages. It seems from the survey that access to clubs predominantly occurs during adolescence.

“ Adolescence is a key period for establishing life-long health behaviours and these develop in the context of the family, school and community. These contexts can be structural, such as national wealth, income inequality and educational opportunities, or proximal, including family factors, availability of social support, and quality of the neighbourhood and school environment. Without equal access to resources and support across all these contexts, some young people are put at a disadvantage.

Association for Young People's Health⁷

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The ages of young people attending respondents' youth clubs.

Survey responses to: 'How old are the people that you engage with in your role?'



Young people will come [to the youth club] in numbers from [about] the age of 9 and from the age of 14 the numbers will start to fade, only to resurge at the ages of 17 and 18 because they need help with CVs, finding employment, getting onto further or higher education courses.

Chris Martin, Managing Director, Callander Youth Project



The knowledge that their local youth club will be there for them, on their terms, when they need it, is particularly important for young people faced with more complex barriers. A high proportion of youth groups across the UK work with young people with distinct needs, as seen in our survey results.



The circumstances of young people attending respondents' youth clubs.

Survey responses to: 'Do any of the young people you engage with identify with any of the following categories?'

The opportunities young people living in care receive through youth groups and projects can be critical. Around half of all looked after children (age 5-16) were considered to be 'borderline' or 'cause for concern' in relation to their emotional and behavioural health, they were twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school and nearly three times more likely to have a fixed term exclusion than all children⁸.

CASE STUDY

Andrew Kent Music Academy Youth Project

The Andrew Kent Music Academy (AKMA) in Swansea worked with a young man who was in care and whose behaviour was really difficult, to the point where he was assaulting members of staff at his care home. The Youth Offending Service referred him to the Academy after he received a court order. The young man's caseworker noted he initially had difficulties communicating and holding down conversations, but noticed "a massive difference to his behaviour" in the care home when he started attending the Academy youth project.

“

Young people will come [to the youth club] in numbers from [about] the age of 9 and from the age of 14 the numbers will start to fade, only to resurge at the ages of 17 and 18 because they need help with CVs, finding employment, getting onto further or higher education courses.

Chris Martin, Managing Director, Callander Youth Project

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At a time when 90% of councils have cut their services for young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)⁹, youth groups can help young people reach their career targets and goals.

⁹ Richardson, H. 2015.

CASE STUDY

Granton Youth Centre

Ryan had a strong relationship with the youth workers at Granton Youth Centre (GYC). Growing up, he frequently got into trouble but they never gave up on him. They helped him overcome personal issues and change his mind-set so he could take his life in a better direction. GYC helped him turn his life around from being a young person who went to prison for assault, to becoming a disciplined local boxing champion.

Hayley, a young parent, was also supported by GYC to get back on her feet and into employment.

“

I have been going to this centre since I was 14 years old. The staff are so helpful and are there to help anyone. I am a single parent and they have helped me out massively by helping me back into employment and also to give support to my daughter

Hayley, Participant, Granton Youth Centre, Edinburgh

”



CASE STUDY

Callander Youth Project Trust

Chelsea attended Callander Youth Project from the age of 10. She developed an interest in joining the Royal Air Force at the age of 14, but was unsure how to achieve this goal. After leaving school at 17 she began working at a local pub. At 19 she applied to work at Callander Youth Project and was offered a six-month employment contract at the Bridgend Café and the Callander Hostel (both social enterprises run by Callander Youth Trust). Whilst working with them she received extensive training and support for her goal of joining the Royal Air Force.



I feel the future is bright, with the training I have had it is going to be easier to get a job in the future. CYPT do not hold back at all, putting us through training programmes. Just two weeks after I started working, they organised health and safety training, food training, everything.

Chelsea, Participant, Callander Youth Project Trust



Megan, a youth worker who had known Chelsea since she was 12, helped her prepare for her RAF interview; advising on the kinds of questions she may be asked, helping her to learn RAF history, and conducting mock interviews with her. Chelsea was successful at interview stage and will begin her training with the RAF once her contract with Callander Youth Project is complete.

The relationships developed at a youth club are not always with a youth worker but also with other young people. Young people at Trans*Form Cymru were interviewed and told us how through the youth club they have developed peer relationships which help them with their self-belief and confidence.

“ Six months ago I was sat in my bedroom. I did not feel like I had any friends and now I am in a position where I have this whole network around me. It is the peer support that has been huge in helping my growth in confidence.

Young person, Trans*Form



CASE STUDY

Trans*Form Cymru Project, political engagement

Through coming together to share their experiences, young people from the Trans*Form Cymru Project were able to identify the key issues they wanted to address and collectively take their concerns to two Welsh minsters; the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Lesley Griffiths and the Health Minister, Mark Drakeford.

Their feedback persuaded the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to write to the Education Minister asking for new guidance on the school issues highlighted by Trans*Form. She has also given her backing to public bodies in Wales signing up to the Trans*Form Charter which enables organisations to improve their trans* inclusion practices.

In addition, the Health Minister has agreed to review the care pathway through which young people can access gender reassignment treatment, to direct Local Health Boards to provide services such as blood testing for hormones, and to move to establish a gender reassignment clinic in Wales. Young people have also met senior leaders in local government, the health service and housing.

Many of the young people we spoke to mentioned that youth workers had raised their aspirations and helped them to see the world was bigger than their local area. Some also spoke about the fact that due to peer pressure or challenges at home it would have been difficult for them to discuss their personal issues and ambitions with friends, relatives or parents. A number of young people cited fear of rejection and the unknown, or being judged, as barriers to exploring new opportunities.

“ *Some kids might not want to go home, their home's not a great situation, so that little youth club community there is a good thing.*

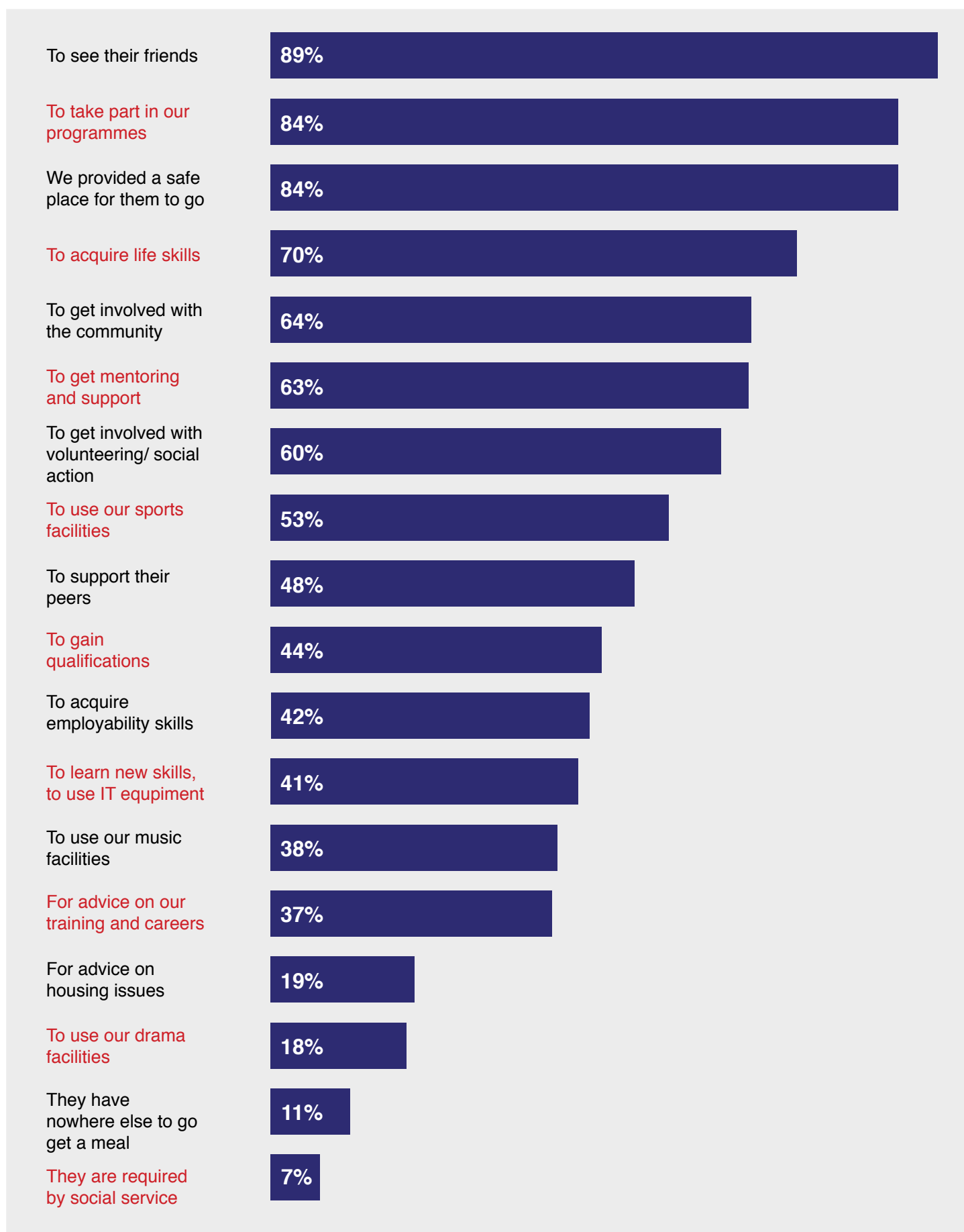
*Dizzee Rascal, Evening Standard Interview*¹⁰ ”

Some of the young people we encountered felt so indebted to their youth worker that they were inspired to become youth workers themselves and ‘give back to others’ the same support they were given. At the Laburnum Boat Club, for example, the majority of current staff members first attended the club as young people.

Other young people we interviewed did not aspire to be youth workers, but still expressed a wish to remain involved with some form of youth work through volunteering. A young man called James, whom we met at Youth Action Northern Ireland, wanted to become a professional performer, but he was also determined to stay engaged with some kind of youth work because of the positive influence the Rainbow Factory youth group had had on his life.

These many and varied examples of good practice throw into question the lingering public perception that youth groups are run down places where young people just ‘hang out’. The Oxford online dictionary definition of youth club is ‘a place or organisation providing leisure activities for young people’. As our research shows, the reality of youth provision today is so much more varied and exciting than this. Well run, high quality community based youth organisations go far beyond providing leisure activities. They strengthen community ties, provide a safe place for young people, raise aspirations, develop vital skills for life, support young people on their journey to adulthood and enable them to become happy, secure citizens capable of contributing something positive to society.

¹⁰ Bryant, M. 2015.



The reasons young people participate in respondents' youth clubs.

Survey responses to : 'Why do young people participate with your youth club/group?'

The youth workers and volunteers who do this work have both hard and soft skills. Professionally qualified youth workers train for 3 years to gain a BA (Hons) in Youth and Community Work. They combine these hard skills with their ability to build relationships across diverse communities, with anyone ranging from, young people from deprived backgrounds to elderly residents in the local care home.

“ Our staff work closely with youth work partners to deliver services to young people. As a result, our staff have benefited enormously from exposure to new and effective ways of engaging with young people on their terms and in their communities. By adopting youth work approaches, our staff are developing new ways of working, which is helping us deliver our services more effectively.

Senior executive, Skills Development Scotland¹¹ ”

We observed that youth workers often have strong roots in the communities in which they work in and this makes them credible and dependable when the community is seeking mediation or preventative action.

“ Tonight, we've been drafted in by the city again; the police have asked me to do a job for them tonight. That's in Edenvale, which is predominantly a Bengali community, it's about a mile and a half from this facility. We have the contract for that area, we deliver two sessions in the school and we have a really good relationship with the Bengali males, every year when it comes to bonfire night they throw fireworks at the police. So, they've drafted us in to try and convince them not to tonight

Phil Tye, Youth Worker, Youth Almighty Project ”

Youth workers and volunteers can help ensure young people make positive life choices and do not get involved in a life of crime, whether it be anti-social behaviour, theft related crimes, or violence. They perform a valuable role as a responsible adult, who is not judgemental, but will offer help and support whilst respecting confidentiality (within boundaries of safety).

“ Yes, without this youth club, you would have more anti-social behaviour. This youth club is here for all types of kids and young people [but it] has always worked better in my mind with the hard to reach kids and young people. There has never been a barrier where it was just for this type of person, it's been a good mix. But it's also been where you would find kids you'd have trouble with.

Patricia Smith, Counsellor and Lead Member for Children's Services,
Sunderland Council

”



There could be an increase
in crime in our local area if
my youth club/group was
shut down

**68% respondents
agreed**

Survey responses to: 'Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements'

Through developing long-term relationships based on mutual respect, youth organisations are able to provide support to young people at the most difficult periods in their lives.



CASE STUDY

Youth Almighty Project

We spoke to a young person at the Youth Almighty Project who had been suicidal. After attempting to take their own life, they insisted on speaking to a youth worker at Youth Almighty before anything else, including medical attention. The youth worker was able to support the young person through the issues they were battling with, highlighting the positives in their life, that they did not have to go through their issue alone and that there were services that could help them.

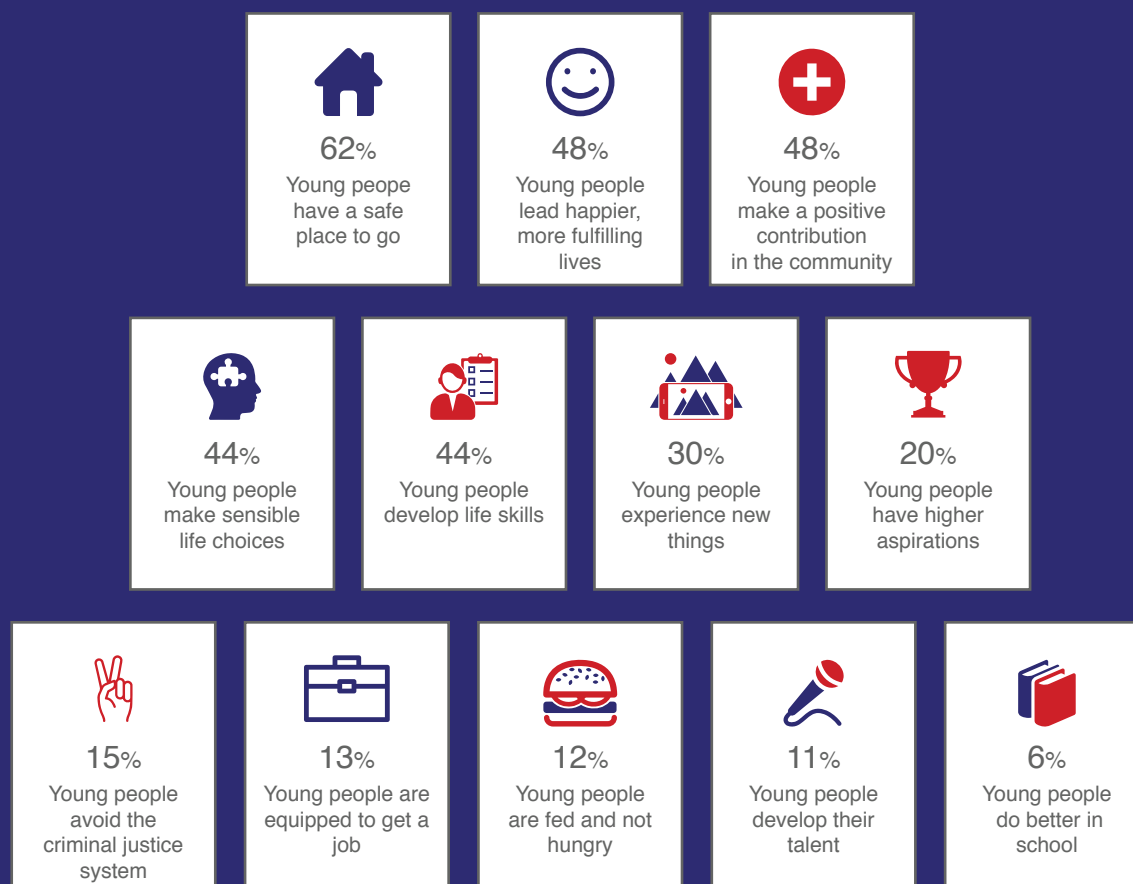
This report aims to bring this invaluable work to life by sharing case studies and research findings from across the UK. We hope you will enjoy reading 'Local Youth Groups Today' and come away inspired to support the incredible work youth clubs and projects do day in, day out, to give young people a better future.



Supporting the Journey to Adulthood

All youth groups and projects featured in this report are united by their focus on supporting young people on the journey to adulthood. Some work with young people for many years, others provide services at a pivotal point in the young person's life, but they all assist with the transition to becoming an independent adult.

Youth organisations provide an environment where young people feel welcome and safe, organise activities for young people which are enjoyable, provide moral and emotional support and advice to the young people who attend, and run programmes that enable young people to develop the life skills they need to grow up healthily, amid the developing stresses in young people's lives.



The primary impacts of respondents' work with young people.

Survey responses to: 'What is the primary impact of your work with young people?'

NB. %s relate to respondents who ranked the impact in their top 3.

Through our research, we identified that despite the fact that youth groups varied enormously in how they delivered support and services to young people, they were all committed to ensuring young people fulfil their potential at different stages in their development. They are well-placed to identify changes in how young people in their care are growing up and to recognise the changing challenges and issues that young people are facing.



The biggest issues young people engaged by the respondents' clubs face.

Survey responses to: 'What are the 3 biggest issues that the young people you are engaging with face?'

Youth groups provide informal and non-formal learning that is often youth led and delivered in an environment and format that suits the young people involved. Skills are generally acquired through a mixture of small group sessions, practical hands on learning, peer education and one-to-one support. Knowledge is not imparted via one medium within a set period of time, but shared in many different ways to suit the pace and style of learning preferred by each young person. In this way youth work methodology mirrors the 'real world' where we are all constantly learning through doing.

Youth groups provide a valuable complimentary service to schools, offering young people an equal (to a large degree) and down-to-earth relationship with youth workers, as opposed to the hierarchical and authority based relationship they may have with teachers at school. This approach forces them to take responsibility for their own actions and choices. As a result it can take longer to produce results but the outcomes are more sustainable.

“ *It makes me feel like the help and support they are offering is genuine, unlike teachers, because with teachers you have to guess [...] if they are doing it because they want to or they have to, so you are unsure if they are helping you properly, but here at the youth club they help us because they want to.*

Participant, youth project

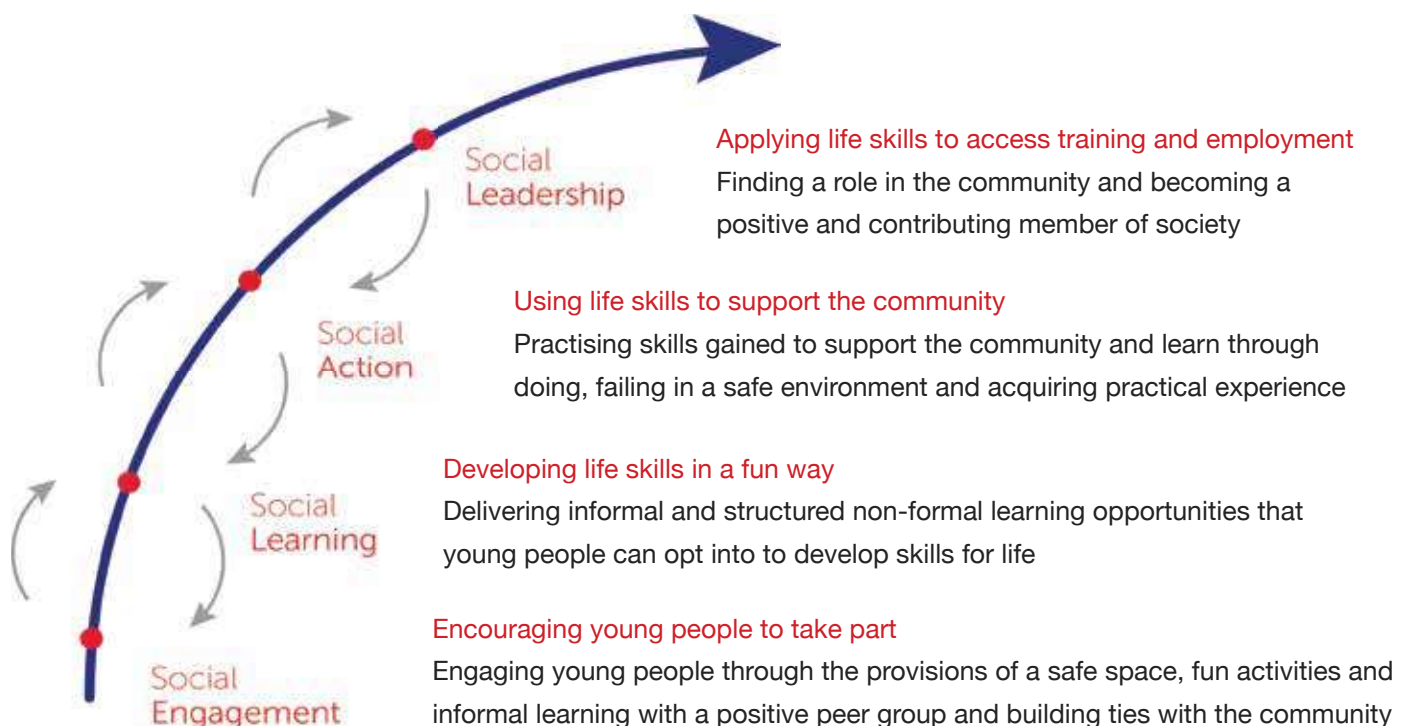


Part of what makes youth provision so special is that each group has the freedom and flexibility to deliver activities in a range of different ways, to best suit the young people they work with and their needs. However, there were some common themes uniting the youth organisations we studied.

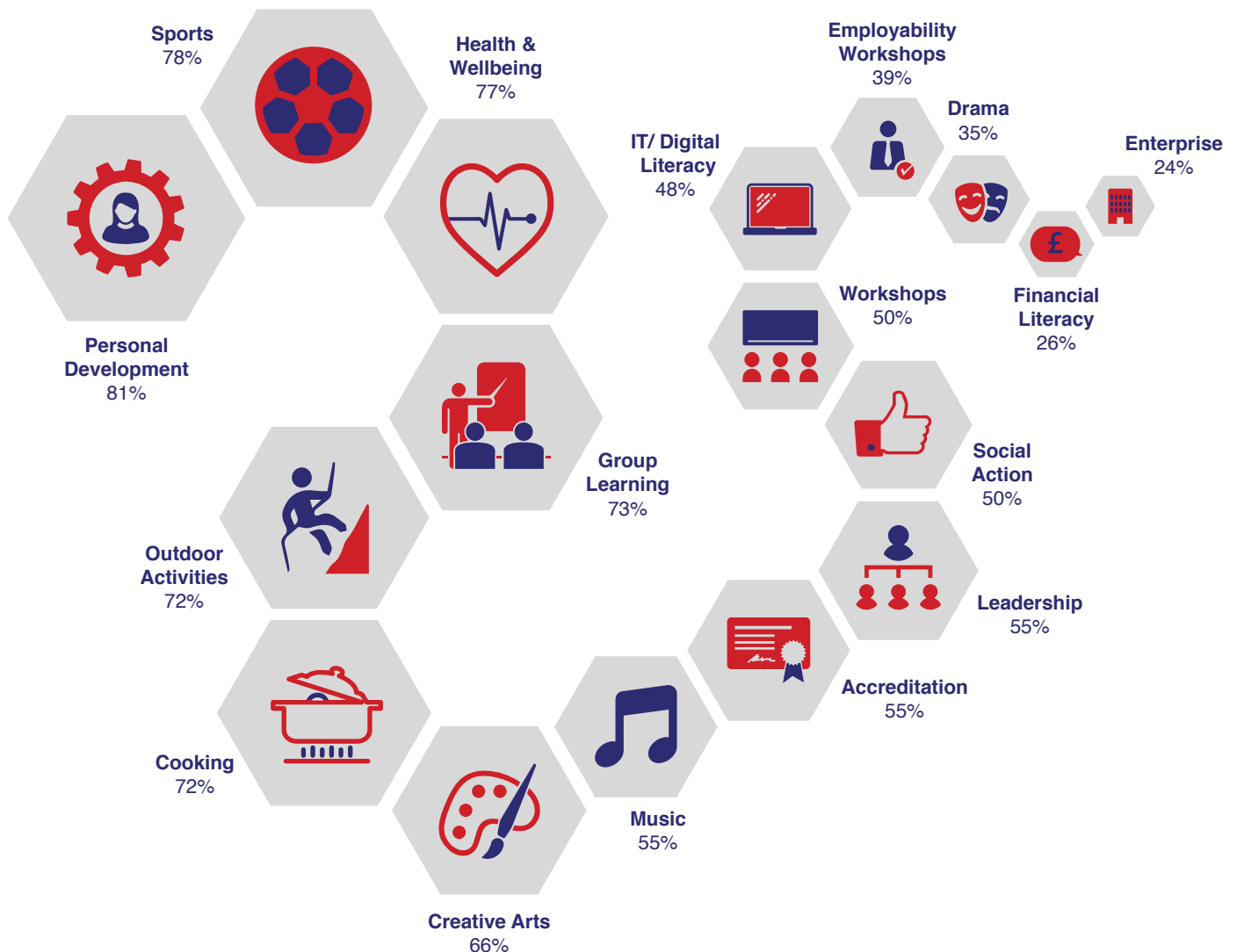
We identified that modern youth groups invariably use informal and non-formal learning approaches to complement (or in some cases replace) formal academic learning to provide a truly rounded education to young people. Their primary areas of activity are summarised by UK Youth under four main areas of work:

- Social Engagement - encouraging young people to take part
- Social Learning - developing life skills in a fun way
- Social Action - using life skills to support the community
- Social Leadership - applying life skills to access training and employment

In this way, youth groups support young people through a developmental journey, as illustrated by the **Social Development Journey** below.



Some youth groups deliver supportive activities at every stage of the Social Development Journey, whilst others specialise in one or two areas. For example, a youth club might offer Social Engagement activity like drop-in music or dance sessions, then encourage young people to take part in structured Social Learning by signing them up to a six-week music course designed to develop their self-awareness, resilience and team work skills.



Activities commonly provided at respondents' youth club.

Survey responses to: 'Which of the following activities does your club/group facilitate or provide?'

Progress along the Social Development Journey is different for each young person, some will begin with Social Engagement in their local youth club at an early age and progress through all four stages as they get older, culminating in finding a productive role for themselves as young adults. Other young people may engage with one or two of these areas to address skills gaps, improve specific capabilities, or take part in community projects and enhance their curriculum vitae. Successful youth groups encourage young people to take either route, choosing the path that suits their lifestyle and needs best and enables them to transition successfully from childhood to adulthood.

In the subsequent sections of this report we seek to show how the youth groups we visited (and many others like them) go beyond providing a place to 'hang out' to deliver valuable services in these four areas.

Social Engagement

The first of the four main areas of activity youth organisations deliver is **Social Engagement**. By this we mean that they provide a safe space that is openly accessible to young people from all backgrounds at no cost or for a nominal fee. They offer a range of fun activities to attract young people and create a positive environment where they can socialise and support one another. In this way the youth group becomes a hub where young participants can access new experiences to help them participate in and understand their local community and the wider world beyond it.

Social Engagement is an important factor in forming positive relationships within an informal environment and establishing 'weak ties' between individuals in a community. Research demonstrates that small social interactions can improve social capital, resilience and community cohesion.

“ *Weak ties, often denounced as generative of alienation (Wirth 1938), are seen here as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities*

Mark S. Granovetter, *American Journal of Sociology*¹²

”

What is Social Engagement?

- Providing a safe place to go (physically or online)
- Delivering fun and engaging activities appealing to young people
- Enabling a group of peers to socialise and support one another
- Acting as a catalyst for new ideas and experiences
- Helping young people to experience and understand the wider world
- Engaging young people with community and politics



Youth clubs/groups provide an important safe place for young people to go

87% respondents agreed

Survey responses to: 'Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements'

Early youth clubs ran a wide range of Social Engagement activities, including club choirs, club orchestras, and sports clubs. Many of the sporting activities that are run today had their beginnings in these early clubs; basketball and volley ball were popularised by the YMCA, netball developed through clubs and table tennis took root as an activity in Boys Clubs. Leagues were set up, organised and run by the young members, in this way young people learnt through joining in and developed an understanding of democracy and citizenship.

It was not until the late 1930s that the term 'youth work' started to be used and in the early years of the Second World War, an organised youth service began to emerge, open-access youth clubs and detached youth work (where youth workers went out into the community to build positive relationships with young people). Purpose built youth centres and large youth clubs were created after the publication of the Albemarle Report in 1960, as were the concepts of project work and social education.

It is in this era that Sewel wrote:

“ *The most important aspect and deepest value of club work lies in the sphere of personal relationships — leader and members, leader and helpers, members and members—management committee and club—the club and the wider community.* **”**

One of the projects set up by UK Youth at this time was the PHAB Club designed to bring Physical Handicapped and Able Bodied (PHAB) young people together to learn with and from each other.

Today youth groups continue to deliver a wide range of Social Engagement activities to encourage young people to participate and retain their interest.

CASE STUDY

Granton Youth Club (GYC)

Granton Youth Club is located in an area of high crime - with Granton and the neighbouring area of Pilton both experiencing crime levels significantly higher than the Scottish average. They engage young people by creating a sense of ownership and belonging through establishing an inclusive, non-judgemental atmosphere at the centre. The club is a safe space for young people to talk about the issues in their lives. All participation is voluntary and no young person is forced into doing anything they do not want to do.

“

[Young people feel] it is their space, they have got a sense of identity and that they are involved in the decision processes'

Kevin, Project Manager, Granton Youth Centre

”

Young people shape the activities that occur in the youth club throughout the year and during the school summer holidays. These range from recreational activities like table tennis, pool, dance and music, through to health and well-being support, practical skills based workshops, and academic support in English and maths.

Young members are also involved in obtaining funding (for example from the Scottish government) further adding to their sense of ownership and engagement with the club and helping them develop new skills.

This is a typical example of youth clubs carrying out Social Engagement, through informal interaction that supports and involves young people, encouraging them to take part in activities, courses or programmes that are facilitated by the youth club. Furthermore, it highlights the natural flows into social learning once engagement is cemented.

“

The Laburnum Boat Club is much more than a traditional boat club. It is a youth club that allows young people to do water-based sports, play outdoor sports (basketball or football) or get creative in the 'A' (shaped) building. The Laburnum Boat Club creates an atmosphere of belonging that makes the young people who come there, want to continue to come. This is reflected by the fact one of the young people I met, had been coming there for 6 years and said they wouldn't be stopping any time soon.

Kenny Imafidon, ClearView Research

”

Social Engagement can happen on a large or small scale, from a youth club in a rural village that operates on £18,000 per year, to a purpose built youth centre with annual operating costs in excess of £1million.



CASE STUDY

Bolton Lads & Girls Club

Bolton Lads & Girls Club is one of the biggest youth centres in the UK with 6000 members. It was founded in 1889 to support children as young as 10 who were working 10 to 12 hour days in local factories.

Two church leaders and three industrialists set-up the club by buying an old warehouse in Bark Street and opening it as a hostel, where the young mill workers were able to wash, eat and sleep in peace, away from their looms.



They came in their hundreds, for of all animals, lads are perhaps the most gregarious. They came to meet their fellows under conditions somewhat more comfortable and convenient than their natural meeting place, the street. They initially came for amusement and for games and for nothing else, and if we had told them it was our intention to improve them they would certainly not have come. But it is interesting how quickly their attitude to the Club has changed, it is no longer our Club, it is theirs, and we merely manage it for them. It is no longer a mere place of amusement, but is a place which plays a real part in their lives, it is a place for honour and for success.

Extract from the Bolton Lads Club 1896 Club Review



From the outset youth clubs like Bolton Lads & Girls recognised the need to take young people on a **Social Development Journey**, starting with **Social Engagement** activities to build trust with young people, and then encouraging them to learn new skills through **Social Learning**, which gives them a sense of pride and accomplishment in their achievements.

This is seen in the modern context with OnSide Youth Zones, which seek to replicate the successful Bolton Lads & Girls Club model in other urban centres across the UK. Their philosophy of 'try, team, train' develops young people through capturing their interest in activities, to honing skills with supportive coaches and finally, progressing their involvement to joining and leading teams in the Youth Zone or local community ¹⁴

¹⁴ OnSide Youth Zones, 2016.

A vital part of Social Engagement is building respect and trust with young people, between them and their peers, and with the wider community. Many of the young people we spoke to said their youth group had been an important catalyst in their personal development because it offered them a safe space, where they could discuss their issues with a trusted adult who would work with them to explore solutions.

CASE STUDY

Youth Almighty Project

Jerome, a member of the Youth Almighty Project, told us he really appreciated the relationship of trust and confidence between him and his youth workers. He and his friends feel more comfortable talking about their concerns in an informal environment, where they can have a low key conversation and progress things at their own pace. This approach can have surprisingly far reaching consequences.

“

Just by playing football with a young person.... [just in that moment] you could find out their issues, sign post them to the appropriate place. That game of football could achieve amazing things.

Joanne Laverick, Project Manager, Youth Almighty Project

”

The right activity or environment for one young person might be wrong for another. Good youth workers and skilled volunteers adapt their approach to suit the group or individual they are working with. During our focus group with the Trans*Form Cymru Project in Wales, all the young people who took part identify as transgender. They were very clear about the fact that their youth worker, who was not transgender, was non-judgemental and provided them with a safe space to talk about the issues they faced and supported them to achieve their personal goals.

Social Engagement activities are more than just a ‘nice to have’. Through our research it became clear that they can have a transformational effect on people’s lives.

“ *[The youth club is] very beneficial. My daughter is disabled, she doesn't go out by herself, there would be no break for me if she couldn't get in here. It is really beneficial, if this isn't on, it bounces back to me as I'm responsible for her, so as a community it gives me the break that I need and Rachel the break she needs and the social skills that she needs.*

Parent and Volunteer, Youth Almighty Project

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“ *I work with kids with disabilities. Recently our funding was cut in the June, now we are down to only one staff member. It not only gives the youth a wee bit of respite but it also gives the parents some respite as we work with all sorts of disabilities.*

Lisa, Youth Worker, Belfast

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Once young people start to feel a sense of belonging to a community, youth workers can encourage them to take a more active role in decision-making. This can be achieved through participation in club decisions, volunteering, getting involved in local politics, or taking an interest in national and international events. High quality youth projects encourage young people to develop an interest in the world, and take responsibility for what happens in it – to be participants, not passengers.

“ *...the most important skills that kids need to develop are social skills, because a lot of them are often just in their bedrooms or on their computers/smartphones. You need places like this so that they can interact with other people (and in the real world), otherwise they just wouldn't bother.*

Parent and Volunteer, Youth Almighty Project

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Social Learning

Youth groups deliver **Social Learning** by providing access to local, national or international programmes that are designed to develop life skills through youth-led activities, practical experiences, peer-to-peer education, group sessions, one-to-one coaching or mentoring. Youth groups provide access to information about free or low cost activities and signpost young people towards further opportunities for learning and development. The best youth groups draw on external experts, volunteers, coaches and mentors to offer young people a range of perspectives and access to high quality advice. Many also encourage applications for scholarships and support for education and training.

What is Social Learning?

- Offering a broad variety of informal and structured non-formal education programmes
- Access to local, national and international programmes
- Bringing in external experts, coaches and mentors
- Signposting further opportunities to develop and learn
- Scholarships and grants for training and education

Early youth clubs didn't run programmes about issues such as parenting; they were very much there to offer cultural and educational opportunities and keep young workers out of mischief. However, following the Second World War more attention was given to youth issues in response to the concept of delinquency and moral panic about adolescents.

In 1968 Fred Milson wrote, *'The primary purpose of youth workers is to facilitate the social education of the young in a time of rapid change, to help them to find their place as young adults in the community.'* Programmes of activities to meet these aims varied from place to place and often involved the young people themselves in devising them.

In the 1980s new types of programmes for the unemployed and groups of young mothers emerged, in response to high youth unemployment and an increase in targeted provision. Until then, youth work had been primarily about social mixing to build a cohesive society. Most clubs retained this social mix element but built on it with speakers and workshops that would include careers, housing and budgeting advice.

The youth groups we visited continue to offer a huge range of Social Learning opportunities, from courses on dealing with mental health issues¹⁵ or understanding the democratic process¹⁶, through to becoming a sports coach or starting a record label¹⁷.

“ They are learning how to conduct themselves, how to have a conversation, at an adult (mature) level, how to manage their emotions. [...] Young people are making decisions, taking responsibility, taking authority and learning how to have a debate, discussion, taking feedback, learning what they own in a positive and constructive way (it's the best way to work in my view). Doing this in a considered way is a great learning process.

John Thurlbeck, Trustee, Youth Almighty Project

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¹⁵ UK Youth & Paul Hamlyn, 2015

¹⁶ UK Youth & Cabinet Office, 2015

¹⁷ Global, BPI & UK Youth, 2016

CASE STUDY

Andrew Kent Music Academy youth project

The Andrew Kent Music Academy (AKMA) is part of the Big Music Project, where in its first year it was one of 150 community music hubs in the UK.

We saw evidence that young people have benefited greatly from the Big Music Project by being representatives of AKMA and speaking at conferences and featuring in panel discussions. These young people have developed people skills as they have had to 'speak to different people that [they] would not interact with on a day-to-day basis' (Michael, AKMA). They can develop communication, networking and leadership skills and have many opportunities to better themselves through music. The Big Music Project has allowed the AKMA to expand the social learning they provide. The project manager of AKMA, is a professional DJ, which means young people are learning skills from an individual who has accomplished what many of them are hoping to achieve. Furthermore, Wayne Hannigan has established a network of other professional DJs and music producers, including Rhys from the Futuristic Polar Bears, who often come to the AKMA to put on masterclasses.

This is an excellent example of a youth club carrying out Social Learning to develop life skills with young people in a fun way, through a broad variety of informal and non-formal education programmes.

Forward looking youth groups are able to adapt quickly to be at the cutting edge when it comes to identifying what skills young people will need for the future and adopting creative ways of developing them. We saw a number of innovative practices designed to make technology accessible to young people and encouraging them to get involved with skills that will be crucial to their futures in the modern digital world, such as coding, 3D printing, graphic design and online research.

Many youth groups participate in national programmes that provide facilities, training and funding to deliver Social Learning opportunities to young people.

For example, UK Youth have a long-term partnership in place with Microsoft to set up IT Hubs in youth organisations across the country. This initiative funds the building or much needed renovation of an IT infrastructure into existing community based youth clubs, along with training for their youth workers, volunteers and young people to become IT Champions. This approach has two important benefits for young people; firstly, it provides access to IT hardware and the internet for young people who don't have it at home, so they can do their homework or apply for jobs, and secondly, it improves IT skills through coding workshops and training on useful programmes and applications. This peer-to-peer training model is highly sustainable because it relies on volunteers passing on their skills to the next generation of young people.

CASE STUDY

The Dragon Hall Tech Club

The Dragon Hall Tech Club uses technology as means to engage young people in London who may be excluded from such opportunities. They then provide facilities for young people to learn about 3D Printing, Coding, Augmented Reality Programming, App Design and Radio Production; in order to develop their skills and to inspire them about the possibilities within tech-advancement. These sessions, as one parent stated, “are exceptionally important, particularly because coding is the future hence why it is in the national curriculum.”

When a young person is inspired to create an app or a new piece of technology, then the world becomes their oyster. Considering that nearly one in four adults do not have basic online skills, it is critical that young people are equipped with the relevant insight and knowledge that will open them up to future opportunities.



We have built our 3D printers with the help of Ian Lewis of Replicat3D – our fantastic 3D Printing guru! We have three 3D Printers made by Printrobot (voted best value consumer 3D Printer) who are supporting the development of the Dragon Hall Tech Hub.

Youth Worker, Dragon Hall Trust



Social Action

Once a young person is engaged with activities in their local community and has taken part in a range of Social Learning programmes to gain life skills, youth groups and projects have a vital role to play in providing a safe environment for them to test out what they've learnt. One of the main ways the youth organisations we visited achieve this is through providing Social Action opportunities for young people.

Youth groups recognise that **Social Action** (e.g. local volunteering), has a double benefit; the community benefits from the skills and enthusiasm the young person brings, and the young person benefits from applying their new found skills in practice.

“ To us, social action means ‘practical action in the service of others that creates positive change’. This benefit is to the young people themselves and the communities in which they live.

Step up to Serve, I Will Campaign

”

Social Action is an important part of the **Social Development Journey**. It gives young people the chance to find out what works and what doesn't, and better understand their own strengths and weaknesses. Youth workers and volunteers reported that allowing young people to fail in a safe environment is often as important as supporting them to succeed. They learn a great deal from the experience when things go wrong and there is a trusted adult (and often a supportive peer group) on hand to help them tackle the problem and think through what they might do differently next time.

What is Social Action?

- Access to opportunities for volunteering and supporting the community
- Supporting to take part in community improvement initiatives
- Empowering to be involved in community action and political engagement
- Funding and support for young people to set up new social enterprise and community action initiatives

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century youth clubs were essentially operated as Social Action projects, run by young people for young people. It was expected that the young people involved themselves in the programme and life of the club. Older members would run the programme for the junior club and organise play schemes. There were many community activities that members were involved in and ran, such as reading in hospitals, organising village fairs to raise money for charity, and taking their choir or theatre group to entertain elderly residents in the community.

This tradition continued beyond publication of The Albemarle Report¹⁸ in the form of member committees set up to represent the members and advise the management committee of the youth centre or club. These committees would often undertake training in how to run meetings. Senior members would be encouraged to become young leaders in the junior clubs, for example in the mid 1980s Newcastle Youth and Community Service ran a young leaders course for members from different clubs to learn skills in basic management, programming and leading activities.

Youth groups and projects continue to engage young people in Social Action to develop their skills, improve community cohesion and give back to society. Many volunteer to help run their youth group or project, support local and national events, help out in schools, care homes and hospitals, fundraise for charity or participate in community redevelopment projects, democratic engagement work and community action. According to a recent Ipsos MORI report, 42% of 10-20 year-olds in the UK participated in meaningful Social Action in 2015¹⁹. Our study visits found numerous examples of youth groups that provided opportunities for young people to get involved in some form of meaningful Social Action.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education. 1960.

¹⁹ Ipsos MORI, 2015.

“ Yes, we run a load of different [Social Action] events throughout the year. So a couple of months ago we had an event at a cricket club, where it was a community fun day and we had a group of our young people there as active volunteers, so that was them giving back to the community. They would participate in Remembrance Sunday; they would do the local march, helping out there. Wherever there's something to get involved in and it's not just we force them into it, they are really open and they just want to do it. That's their way of giving back to the community, young people do get a really bad reputation these days, within communities, so that's their way of building up their reputation within the local community.

Lewis Holland, Former service user and Youth Worker, Sunderland

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Encouraging participation in Social Action is a practical way to help young people adopt positive and active roles in the community. This has been shown to help foster positive attitudes, develop empathy and encourage young people to learn from one another. Improving community ties and social connectedness²⁰ are a starting point for addressing multiple social ills.

“ We really encourage and push young people as much as we can so that they can be a positive role model and to be involved in lots of different community-based things. It works.

Phil Tye, youth worker, Youth Almighty Project & a local councillor in Silksworth

”

Research has shown that intergenerational links and community cohesion develop stronger societies²¹. When younger and older generations have the chance to learn from each other, it increases the development of skills and helps to create an age-friendly society. Youth groups help this process by developing intergenerational programmes to bring young and old together.

²⁰ Boeck, T. et al. 2009.

²¹ Buffel, T. et al. 2014.

CASE STUDY

Youth Almighty Project, Intergenerational support programme

Youth Almighty run sessions at their Microsoft Youth Hub²² where young people help elderly local residents with IT related issues and queries. This engagement sparks a better level of understanding between young and old, which can help tackle complex community issues more harmoniously.

“

...we've got a group of elderly ladies that come in on a Thursday afternoon, to do some IT work with me and there's a couple of times where we've had them work with young people. They often come to me with any IT problems that they have (i.e. emails not working) and we then put them with young people, they look at what the young people are doing and it's amazing to see the reaction from one generation to another. They get talking about what happened in their generation in comparison to what's happening these days. It educates both sides; it gives both sides a really different perspective on how things have changed. That, other than the technology side and the advances we've had, it's essentially the same sort of things that have gone on.

Lewis Holland, Former service user and Youth Worker

”

This is a powerful example of Social Action in practice; helping young people to apply the life skills they have gained at the youth club in order to support the local community. It has been stated that the involvement of young people within the community allows them the opportunity to develop their self-esteem and confidence through valued social roles²³. Youth groups are often able to achieve this by providing access to opportunities for young people to volunteer in the community, or by working with corporate volunteers from local businesses.

²² Youth Almighty joined UK Youth's Microsoft Youth Hub network in 2014, becoming an Ambassador Youth Hub in 2015.

²³ Newman, T & Blackburn, S. 2002.

“ Improving the community was the reason that we set [Youth Almighty] up. The levels of antisocial behaviour in the area were astronomical, community relations with the resident committee and different older people’s groups were very negative towards young people, [and] there just was not any facilities for young people.

Phil Tye, youth worker, Youth Almighty Project & a local councillor for Silksworth

”



Social Leadership

The fourth main area of activity on the **Social Development Journey** is **Social Leadership**. Once young people have been introduced to Social Engagement activities, acquired life skills through Social Learning and put those skills into practice through Social Action, many youth groups then offer Social Leadership activities as a pathway into employment or alternative long term roles in the community.

Social Leadership activities give young people access to a whole host of support to make the final transition to adulthood. We found that youth groups increasingly offer some or all of the following; pre-employability and employability training, advice and support choosing an appropriate career path, access to mentors and coaches, opportunities to network with people from the business community, sign posting to relevant training programmes and qualifications, use of facilities to start a new business, enterprise grants or loans, internships, traineeships, apprenticeships, or full time paid employment within a youth organisation or social enterprise.



Youth clubs/groups teach young people vital skills to help them access and retain employment

92% respondents agreed

Survey responses to: 'Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements'

For those young people with complex needs who are unable to take on fulltime paid employment, youth groups are often highly effective at supporting them into flexible part time roles, sustainable volunteering positions, or further training.

What is Social Leadership?

- Help in creating a role in the community
- Training in the world of work, employment, and entrepreneurship
- Access to real world experiences through speakers, internships, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment opportunities
- A safe place to prepare for work or undertake paid for employment (physically or online)
- Provide seed funding, grants and investment to support entrepreneurial ventures

Social Leadership has been at the centre of many youth clubs for over a hundred years, encouraging young people to set up competitions and help run sports teams and leagues. Over thirty years ago the National Association of Youth Clubs (now UK Youth) ran a government sponsored programme, which placed young leaders in established youth centres and provided on-the-job training to become qualified youth workers.

One project in the 1990s worked with young people who had experienced homelessness. It trained them to become peer educators who ran workshops about leaving home in care homes, schools and hostels. Included within the training programme for this was a study of government housing policy, a visit to the Houses of Parliament and research into the impact of Foyers, which offer an integrated accommodation and training model²⁴. Programmes like this, which give young people clear roles and responsibilities similar to those they would be expected to take on in the work place, have long been a valuable stepping stone into employment.

There are currently 690,000 young people aged 16-24 excluded from economically contributing to society²⁵, due to a range of factors including; lack of qualifications, limited skills and experience; lack of information on available education and training programmes; and barriers to creating start-up businesses. The government states that reducing the number of young people who are currently not in employment, education or training (NEET) is a high priority, and youth groups can help tackle this issue through a range of methods.

In order to move young people into work, one of the first areas of focus must be ensuring they have aspirations that are ambitious but attainable. We observed that good youth groups are highly effective at raising awareness of opportunities and nurturing and expanding young people's aspirations through engagement. Many

²⁴ Lovatt & Whitehead. 2003.

²⁵ NEET Statistic Quarterly Briefing, October to December 2015

youth groups provide access to a range of real-world experiences through speakers, internships, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment. This can include the youth club being a place for the young people to volunteer or undertake paid employment.

Youth workers are well placed to empower young people through mentoring and introductions to positive role models. They can help channel young people's talents positively, unlocking their potential and helping them to see what is possible, whether that be a place at a top university, a permanent job with a local small business, or a career in the music industry.



Youth clubs/groups enable young people to fulfil/unlock their potential

97% respondents agreed

Survey responses to: 'Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements'

CASE STUDY

Andrew Kent Music Academy, employability skills training

The Andrew Kent Music Academy (AKMA) is a valuable music project, where young people can engage in **Social Leadership** activities, guided by project tutors who get them to think about their futures. Our interviews with young people who attended the project, showed that young people on the project are inspired by the staff, and by the visible achievements of other young people already participating. Taking part motivates them to succeed not only in music, but also in life. AKMA helps young people with interview and CV writings skills, and actively supports them to look for suitable education programmes, internships and traineeships that will assist them into work.

“

I have referred young people to Wayne at AKMA for a couple of day sessions, where they just have a few days with him and he gets them to that point where they are almost employment-ready. So, Wayne will get the young people in at a certain time, which shows that they are willing to come in on time and spend an agreed amount of time there. This is a bit like they are going to do volunteer work, [...] so it is just about building young people up to that point where we can eventually get them into some sort of college or provision that will actually benefit them.

Staff Member, Youth Offending Team, Swansea

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A large number of youth groups across the UK offer practical pre-employability skills training. Some youth groups provide educational opportunities in numeracy and literacy for those who fall short of qualifications needed to progress post GCSE. This educational support, as well as confidence building and communication workshops, builds skills considered fundamental for success in the workplace²⁶.

Youth groups provide specialist programmes for those not in education, employment or training, often aimed at older young people aged 18-25. These may be generalist courses or tailored to a specific industry. Youth groups typically provide ongoing support and engagement throughout the training course and beyond. They also offer work experience and placements, and support individualised career pathways. For example, Youth Action Northern Ireland provides a carefully tailored programme aimed at up-skilling young people so they can access employment. They develop their CV writing and interview skills, then work towards getting them valuable work experience.

A growing number of young people in their late teens and early twenties are going to youth groups specifically for support around employment and entrepreneurship. This has led clubs to set up or expand projects to get young people into employment and entrepreneurship.

CASE STUDY

Youth Almighty Project, employability skills training

Youth Almighty attracts young people at different stages of their lives. They work with young people by assessing the level of skills they have, and analysing the level of skills they might need to reach their development goals. Youth Almighty helps young people with career planning and can provide courses to help them improve their employability skills. They also help young people to further their education, by helping them apply for college, university, apprenticeships and other forms of training. Support from Youth Almighty is designed to motivate, up-skill and empower young people by giving them the tools to make a successful transition into adulthood.

Some young people attending Youth Almighty have left school without a CV or a career plan. The club helps them create a CV and teaches them CV writing skills. They also work closely with Connexions, who provide training and employment opportunities for young people. Youth Almighty has partnerships with local businesses to provide training. For example, they work with Tyne & Wearside Estates Ltd to provide young people with business administration training, adding to their skill set and making them more employable.

Many youth groups help reduce levels of unemployment through offering work experience placements, volunteering and paid jobs to increase the life chances of a young person and help them break into their chosen career. The Laburnum Boat Club has a water sports programme that helps young people become qualified instructors or lifeguards so that they can be hired as professionals.

A growing area of opportunity is the provision of space and support for young people to set up their own business. Youth clubs are often less busy during the day and can therefore open up their facilities to provide 'incubator' space for young entrepreneurs. This may be as simple as offering them use of the clubs computers or as complex as setting up an incubator programme that offers seed funding, mentoring and introductions to local businesses.

Many young people have aspirations to positively contribute to their communities and society through social enterprise and entrepreneurship, but are not sure where to start. Some youth groups we visited assisted them with this, by putting them in touch with experts who could help, or by inviting external agencies in to deliver insight sessions. Callander Youth Project Trust goes one step further and involves young people in running its own social enterprises (a café and a hotel) to give them a better understanding of what running a business really entails.

For some young people, such as those with complex needs, dealing with illness, or living in areas of very high unemployment, it is important to remember that full-time paid employment or entrepreneurship may not be an option. In these instances, a youth group can be a lifeline that keeps them in touch with a peer group of a similar age and helps them to find and access a long-term positive role in the community. Social Leadership should not therefore only refer to obtaining employment, it is also about taking a leadership role in the local community, engaging in long term volunteering, building strong relationships and support mechanisms, developing community ties and embarking on life long learning.



Key Findings

In this report we have revealed what local youth clubs and projects do at a grassroots level, including how they are adding value to young people, their ability to improve community cohesion, and their role in supporting the transition into adulthood and employment.

Through our conversations, interviews and data gathering, we have identified a number of key findings that define a successful, young person centred, high quality and sustainable local youth group.

1. Mapping provisions to the Social Development Journey

Our first key finding is that good local youth groups deliver activities across some or all of the Social Development Journey, with the objective of supporting young people on their transition from childhood to adulthood, through a comprehensive and accessible range of services, which include:

- **Social Engagement**
- **Social Learning**
- **Social Action**
- **Social Leadership**

This range of delivery supports young people to make the transition to adulthood with the skills and experience they require to become independent, self-assured, and a positive force for change in their own lives and the lives of others.

This framework helps us to understand and define what different youth groups and services contribute to this supported transition towards adulthood. How this journey is delivered however will vary greatly from provision to provision and we can therefore begin to think of the activities delivered by frontline services in achieving the Social Development Journey as their 'Social Curriculum'.

2. Services for young people by young people

The best local youth groups ensure that they work with young people to co-create programmes and services, integrate youth participation models throughout their organisation while being driven by a clear mission to work with and for young people above all else.

Programme planning and youth service activities are informed by clearly identified and evidenced local need, with objectives and evaluative methodology embedded into the intervention design ahead of time, with young people engaged every step of the way. Additionally we found a number of examples where young people sit on their trustee boards and management structures and are encouraged to co-produce and when necessary co-deliver services and projects.

3. Commitment to high quality service delivery

The most impactful local youth groups we encountered endeavour to have the right people and processes in place to operate efficiently, and adhere to appropriate safeguarding principles, with a strong effective leadership and clear structures for collaboration.

Their trustee boards and management structures have developed a 3 to 5 year sustainability and development plan for their services. With managers and staff fully supported in order to develop and deliver these plans.

Staff and volunteers showed that they are willing to experiment with new approaches in a bid to continuously improve services for young people. They embrace change, test and learn without fear of failure. They are also trained appropriately and supported in their work through a programme of relevant youth work training and other professional development opportunities.

Partnerships with other local services (including those from different care groups such as older people) are seen as an essential element of their delivery framework, in many cases including the sharing of premises and resources, and developing joint projects that promote young people as an asset to their local community.

The most accessible and vibrant youth groups have accessibility plans that include innovative ways of utilising social media, phone applications and internet-based services, meaning they are able to connect with young people beyond building based face-to-face activities. These plans tend to include communication strategies and services which meet the diversity of the local population of young people and which help young people to access and attend youth services or satellite venues and activities.

4. Demonstrating and communicating value (impact measurement)

Through this research we found examples of youth groups that were able to explain their primary purpose, how they measure success, and prove a link between their work and the outcomes achieved.

We found that many of these youth groups have begun to develop a culture in which accountability and impact measurement is embedded throughout the service, with staff perceiving this as a vital element of their role.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data and information is collected and used appropriately to reflect on and analyse how to improve service provisions, promote services locally and nationally, and contribute to securing further investment. Evaluation methodologies are embedded within programme design and delivery from the outset, and are not perceived as additional but rather integral to interventions and services being provided.

Systems and processes for collecting appropriate data and evidence are in place, designed to be manageable for staff and volunteers and beneficial for young people. We also found evidence of local youth groups being willing and able to adopt new language in order to explain their work and impact to funders and supporters wherever it will help their cause, without compromising on integrity. For example they showed a readiness to refer to open access youth work as Social Engagement or youth-led volunteering and community projects as Social Action.

5. Incorporating strategies for sustainability (funding and business models)

In this climate of rapid funding changes, developing new financial approaches is potentially the most significant challenge facing any local youth provision, however we have found that the most sustainable youth groups identified this need early and have actively begun to create new businesses models.

They have diversified their funding base so as not to rely too heavily on any one income stream, developed local community partnerships and positioned themselves in a competitive environment, including being open to the potential for social investment, embracing and developing social enterprise approaches, and tendering for the delivery of services and commissions from their local authority.

They are also willing and able to partner with other youth facing organisations including social enterprises, youth-led initiatives and sports clubs, to ensure young people have access to a wide range of opportunities across the Social Development Journey.

Additionally, they seek to develop partnerships with a wide range of other stakeholders in the community to develop local 'collective impact' projects, uniting all those interested in achieving better outcomes for young people, including police, schools, parents, social services, local authority, healthcare providers, private sector organisations and volunteers.

They are also working towards further up-skilling their workforce through meaningful business management and social enterprise training, and the embedding of effective quality assurance systems and processes.



Priorities for National Bodies and Funders

Through this process of recognizing excellence as well as the challenges faced by local youth groups, we have been able to identify and articulate some priorities for national bodies and funders in support of these local organisations. The below should not, however, be read as a roadmap for the youth sector, or an exhaustive list of challenges, but rather extensive recommendations intended to inform the direction of travel for the sector.



Biggest challenges faced by the respondent's youth club.

Survey responses to: 'What are the biggest challenges faced by your youth club?'

NB. %s relate to respondents who ranked the challenge in their top 3.

Supporting the development and enhancement of a high quality of service delivery

- There is a need for further resource to be created in order to support training, qualifications and professional development at a local level, including the creation of more online training, guidance and resources.
- Key organisations, including youth group affiliations, national bodies and Local Government Associations need to work together to develop frameworks for quality assuring the delivery of services, the development of the workforce, and models of sustainability. These quality assurance frameworks should be created with a view to ensuring an open-access, process-focused and youth-centred approach is protected, while also being mindful of the requirement for need-led targeted and outcome focused approaches.
- An online user-led quality assurance system is needed for the benefit of local youth groups. This would allow young people to provide feedback and enable on-going user informed quality assurance of local youth services.

Making it easier for local youth groups to better demonstrate and communicate value

- There is demonstrably a need to support the adoption of a common language and framework to describe what the youth sector does, in order that delivery organisations of all sizes can communicate where they fit in to the wider ecosystem of youth services and are able to better articulate their value.
- Leading youth organisations and other relevant bodies need to support the development of a knowledge and skills base for impact assessment and the creation of evidence-focused approaches, in order that they be embedded within the sector.

Currently this knowledge and skills base mostly exists in organisations external to the youth sector. The sector as a whole needs to begin to feel more comfortable and confident working in this way, and be conscious of having evaluative methodologies fully integrated into delivery.

- Further research needs to be funded on the outcomes achieved by local youth groups, to champion the individual and societal value of these groups and to help protect them from further funding cuts.
- A national project is required to establish recommendations for outcomes monitoring for core youth group activities, with regional commissions tasked to enable outcome monitoring systems to be implemented locally.

- A national communication strategy and campaign should be implemented to raise the profile of local youth groups and their individual and societal benefits, and how they integrate with the collective impact across all youth services. With a view to promote the value of youth groups, build local and national support for these services, and increase youth sector volunteer engagement.
- The collation, analysis and sharing of data about geographical and demographic need will make it much easier for youth groups to respond locally and access information to support bids for funding (e.g. This Girl Can research compiled by Sport England).²⁷

Developing and incorporating strategies for sustainability

- Local youth groups are currently under significant threat due to reductions in local and central funding. These cuts should be tracked and monitored by youth group umbrella and affiliation bodies, with representations made to central and local governments to protect these valuable community resources.
- To better understand the size, shape, and needs of the youth sector, a national mapping exercise needs to take place to show exactly what is provided and where provisions still exist. This will help stakeholders and sector leaders to contextualise issues raised in this report and to deal with them in an informed and strategic way.

A sector-wide mapping exercise would additionally identify gaps in service provisions, local and national duplication, over and under resourcing, and opportunities to collaborate and consolidate the sector, in consideration of the Social Development Journey framework.

- A national sustainability project is required to include; business development support for youth group managers, local ‘business buddies’ schemes for youth groups, and an online resource, which should include best practice examples from youth projects that have successfully achieved sustainability.
- Sector leading organisations need to lobby for the establishment of a new fund, from across sectors, in order to provide seed funding for existing youth organisations to help them achieve sustainability, as well as workforce development and infrastructure support for successful and impactful local youth groups.

²⁷ Sport England, 2015.

- There is a need to mobilise cross-sector support, encouraging the private sector to step up to take a long-term view, supporting the youth sector to become more sustainable. This could be through the identification and brokering of opportunities for resource from the private sector to be used to benefit the youth sector. Both nationally and locally, this may include; pro-bono support, infrastructure investment, volunteering, training, work experience and the creation of more diverse apprenticeship opportunities.
- Finally, a good-practice, data sharing and evidence collection online tool is required across youth groups and the wider sector. This can be used to spread excellence, demonstrate value and enable the sustainability of the sector. In addition to improving practice, more effectively managing referrals, and identifying opportunities for local and national collaboration and resource sharing.

Conclusions

This report brings together case studies of individual youth groups across the UK to give you a flavour of the depth and breadth of activity they are engaged in and, in so doing, begin to illustrate the collective impact of community based youth work. Through this research we have also been able to identify good practice that already exists within local youth groups, that supports high quality delivery, impact assessment, and sustainability.

Our research suggests that the fundamental needs of young people today remain much the same as those of previous generations; they attend youth groups predominantly to see their friends, have a safe place to go, take part in programmes to gain new skills, get involved in the community, and access support and mentoring. Many are able to gain qualifications and access employment as a direct result of their participation. It is therefore clear that the needs of young people have not changed so dramatically that local youth groups are no longer required. Good youth groups are constantly adapting to change and innovating to keep young people interested and engaged. Those that do not respond to the needs of young people, for example by failing to include them in decision making or adopt new approaches and technology, will inevitably fall out of favour. However, they are in the minority. Most modern local youth groups are highly valued by the young people they work with and the communities they operate within.

At the beginning of this report we also asked whether new, alternative models of youth service provision are the way forward. Our findings suggest that the optimal model of local youth provision is one that builds on tried and tested methods without being afraid to make changes and add new ways of doing things. There is an important role for both open access and targeted youth provision. In many cases we saw one organisation operating both approaches, for example running drop in sessions in their youth club coupled with targeted outreach work to encourage young people with specific needs to participate, or delivering open access sports activities along with targeted National Citizen Service (NCS) provision.

We noted that this mixed provision requires multiple types of funding. In some instances it is entirely appropriate for commissioners and funders to concentrate targeted expenditure on specific programmes to achieve a set

of desired outcomes. However, in other areas it is harder to make this approach work; for example, how can we determine if taking part in drop in music sessions for 18 months is going to improve a young person's employment prospects? We observed that progressive local youth groups are grappling with these challenges and starting to make headway. It is clear that just because something is difficult to measure, it doesn't mean we shouldn't try to measure it. Anecdotal feedback suggests that over the long term there can be a positive link between attendance at open access music sessions and employment prospects for some young people. By monitoring and measuring outcomes over the short and long term we can gradually start to build up a more robust evidence base to support this kind of work. In many cases simple monitoring of the young people who interact with a youth group over a 5-10 year period will produce useful and fascinating insights. Leading youth organisations and funders have a responsibility to demystify impact measurement, invest in it at a grassroots level, and support everyone in the sector to find simple, low cost ways to prove the value of what they do.

This brings us to the question that was central to our research; what is the purpose of local youth groups today? Our answer to this question is clear – local youth groups play a vital role in taking young people on a Social Development Journey from childhood to adulthood. They provide wrap around support that complements formal academic attainment, using non formal and informal learning methods to develop the whole person. Their primary areas of activity can be summarised under four main areas of work:

1. Social Engagement - encouraging young people to take part

Engaging young people through the provisions of a safe space, fun activities and informal learning with a positive peer group and building ties with the community

2. Social Learning - developing life skills in a fun way

Delivering informal and structured non-formal learning opportunities that young people can opt into to develop skills for life

3. Social Action - using life skills to support the community

Practising skills gained to support the community and learn through doing, failing in a safe environment and acquiring practical experience

4. Social Leadership - applying life skills to access training and employment

Finding a role in the community and becoming a positive and contributing member of society

Some youth groups deliver supportive activities at every stage of the Social Development Journey, whilst others specialise in one or two areas. For example, a youth club might offer Social Engagement activity like drop-in music or dance sessions, then encourage young people to take part in structured Social Learning by signing them up to a six-week music course designed to develop their self-awareness, resilience and team work skills.

Progress along the Social Development Journey is different for each young person, some will begin with Social Engagement in their local youth club at an early age and progress through all four stages as they get older, culminating in finding a productive role for themselves as young adults. Other young people may engage with one or two of these areas to address skills gaps, improve specific capabilities, or take part in community projects and enhance their curriculum vitae. Successful youth groups encourage young people to take either route, choosing the path that suits their lifestyle and needs best and enables them to transition successfully from childhood to adulthood. In doing this, the youth groups we visited (and many others like them) go beyond providing a place to 'hang out' to deliver valuable services for a diverse range of young people.

This crucial work is in jeopardy. Local youth groups today are facing the most challenging time in their history. A combination of local and central government funding cuts, new models of service procurement and declining public trust in charities have created very challenging times for local youth groups. Whilst larger charities can turn to big corporates for support, or develop new social enterprise models to generate funding, smaller charities generally find it hard to access the resources and expertise required to make such a transition.

There is an urgent need for central and local government, national funders, corporates and communities to support local youth groups through this period of change. By working together, they can ensure local youth groups have sufficient funding, training and volunteers to maintain their services in the short term, whilst they identify ways to deal with this rapid transition and start to develop new operational models and funding streams. Without core funding and practical on-the-ground support many local youth groups will be unable to continue day-to-day services for young people whilst simultaneously designing and implementing a new business plan.

Once local youth groups have been given this vital breathing space, it is important to build the foundations for the long term survival of these community provisions by supporting them to better articulate what they do in order that they can unlock new forms of philanthropic funding, develop new revenue streams, and access social investment.

To achieve this, government, funders, corporates, and communities should work with national and regional representative bodies to support local youth groups to apply existing measurement frameworks, implement funding software, train staff, broker local and national private sector relationships, and develop efficient data capture procedures. In addition to encouraging them to adopt the Social Development Journey Framework in order to provide a common language and articulate which elements of the work they do lead to which outcomes.

This approach to supporting local youth groups in their transition from statutory funding to a mixed economy funding model will smooth the path for many who are facing unprecedented financial constraints. Our hope is that it may also unlock new ways of thinking and exciting innovations that benefit young people and future proof community based youth work for the next generation.

Youth groups have existed in the UK for over 140 years, acting as the lynchpin joining multiple forms of youth provision together, through early intervention, identifying needs, and appropriate signposting into more targeted initiatives. They offer a vibrant mixture of rich and varied activities and support for young people from all walks of life - including some of the most vulnerable in society. The impact on those young people of losing their local youth group can be profound.

Our hope is that this report has highlighted the great work that goes on in local youth groups, and that it will prompt positive action, locally and nationally, to support them and to ensure that they remain.

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