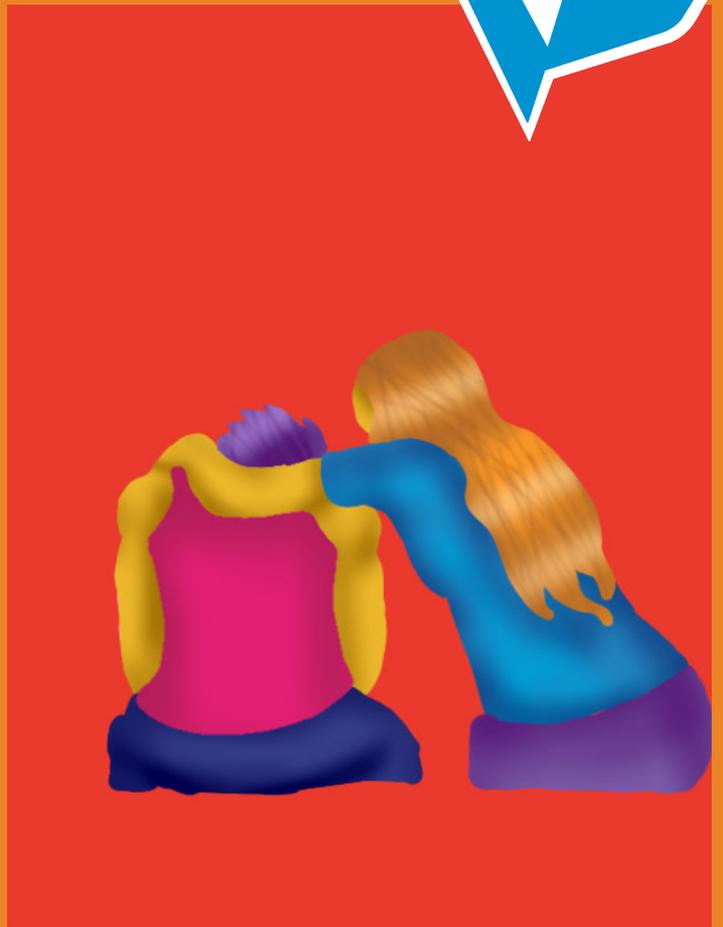


Youth Work and Me



Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that listens to and values the participation of children and young people, and our goal is to do everything we can to make this vision a reality.

Youth work changes lives, yet in recent years we have seen youth work budgets being cut across the country. Through SYP's *Youth Work and Me* campaign, young people will take action to challenge these cuts, and to showcase the amazing impact of youth work across Scotland.

In April and May 2019, 116 young people responded to an online survey to tell SYP how youth work has changed their lives. The survey included four open questions, and a summary of young people's responses is given in this report.¹

This report gives an overview of young people's experiences of youth work in Scotland. As a rights-based organisation, SYP calls on all decision-makers to ensure young people's views and experiences are considered when developing future budgets, allocating resources and carrying out planning.

Young people told us...

1) Youth work is important because it gives young people opportunities, support, greater confidence and self-esteem, friendship, skills, a voice, access to non-formal education, and independence.

2) If youth work did not exist, young people think there would be...

- More isolation, crime and anti-social behaviour, boredom, mental health problems, poverty, and deaths.
- Less opportunities, support, confidence, youth-led change, friendships, and independence.

3) Youth workers in Scotland go above and beyond to support, inspire, and empower young people, and young people really value the work they do.

4) To make a positive change to youth work in Scotland, young people would like to see more: funding, awareness of youth work opportunities amongst young people, accessibility of youth work, youth workers, opportunities for young people, and training for youth workers.

¹ Where responses are sorted into themes, they are listed in order of the number of young people whose comment related to each theme, with the most common theme at the top.

Why is youth work important to you?

Opportunities

“Youth Work gives me opportunities that would not exist other wise and open me up to other cultures and ways of life. Youth work also gives me the chance to meet people from all over Scotland.”

“During the year of young people, there were lots of exciting projects and events in my local area all run by young people with support from the youth work team.”

Support

“Several local youth workers and volunteers stepped into my life at the right time, loving and caring for me when I most needed it. This support network I lacked in my home and in school. Even when I moved out of home at 16 years old, the support did not stop... Providing me opportunities and directions, giving me the ability to keep growing and mature in to an adult.”

“Youth work changed my life when I lost my stepdad when I was just 13 I couldn't cope at all and I started going to [my local youth project] and have achieved so much since.”

Confidence and self-esteem

“Youth work has helped me develop from a young person with little confidence to a young adult in my early twenties who is full of confidence, more able to speak publicly, able to understand myself and my feelings and help inspire those around me.”

"I currently attend a youth group and it is like a second family. You meet people you wouldn't ever talk to and become more confident in yourself."

Friendship

"Youth work let me meet like-minded and friendly people. All of my long term friends were made at some form of youth activity, whether it was sports or music or scouting. These activities also made me a better person and taught me team work, leadership and all kinds of other skills."

Skills

"From building my confidence to enhancing my team work and leadership skills, youth work contributed greatly to my character."

Voice

"It acts as a gateway to my community and lets me get involved knowing my voice will be heard."

"When I was growing up I was always involved in Girlguiding...it was a fantastic opportunity to socialise with other people my age and have fun in a non-[formal] education setting."

Non-formal education

Independence

"Youth work is important to me because it gives me an escape from all the problems and drama in my life... It gives me a chance to get different perspectives on things and offers me a safe space where I am not judged or questioned for my beliefs or actions."

"Our youth forum is a place to just be me - there's no school cliques, no popular or smart kids, everyone is there with a shared interest and that's all we need to get along."

What would happen if there was no youth work in your area?

Young people told us there would be more...

Isolation

“Areas would be so separates and more young people would feel isolated without the opportunities that youth work brings everyone together.”

Crime and anti-social behaviour

“There would nothing for young people to do. There would probably be more people hanging out in the streets and engaging in dangerous activities.”

“Knife crime used to be a huge issue in my home town. Thankfully, many more youth work groups and teams have been set up and a dramatic fall in knife crime has happened over the past few years.”

“Young people would find other ways to entertain themselves such as underage drinking.”

Young people told us there would be less...

Opportunities

“Youth work is a bridge - cutting it would impact both sides the youth worker and the young person. It is a perfect way for generations to learn and connect with each other.”

“Those who don’t engage with school would have no ambition, direction or guidance.”

Support

“The role and status of young people in communities would be hugely diminished. Young people would not be as prepared for life as they are with the support of youth work.”

Confidence

“I wouldn’t meet anyone new and I wouldn’t be that confident talking to other people in high school.”

Young people told us there would be more...

Boredom

“People would be bored and convert to bad habits instead of having fun.”

Mental health problems

“Young people would experience more difficulty building friendships, especially those with additional support needs or struggling with their mental health, since these people often rely on the support that youth work provides, and the confidence it can build!”

Poverty

“[My town] is already highly impoverished and it would leave us and loads of vulnerable young people with no help or support.”

Deaths

“There would be a dramatic increase in the deaths of young people.”

Young people told us there would be less...

Youth-led change

“MSYPs would not be available, leaving areas dominated by 30+ politicians who do not listen or care about the views of young people in society. Young people would be ignored as we are not taken seriously by many adults and the world would become adult dominated meaning laws and bills passed would not be beneficial.”

Friendships

“I would never have met all the friends I have now.”

“I wouldn’t be an MSYP or active in my community or have so many amazing friends.”

Independence

“I actually tried to find summer jobs, but for now I couldn’t find anything. This is disappointing because it really helps to earn some money on your own and to feel independent from parents.”

“ He is my biggest inspiration and I wouldn't be the person I am without him.”

“ They always try their best to meet our expectations and never tells us that we're incapable.”

“ I remember the first time I met her ...She had something about herself that really made me trust her from the start. She was there when I needed to share my problems with or cry about things. Without her, I don't think we would have been able to do what we do right now.”

“ Youth workers bring something unique to the experience. Some are more maternal and nurturing whilst others can give you that tough love that you sometimes need!”

Is there a youth worker who has had a particular impact on you?

“ I was trying to find my place in the world and they gave me the confidence to make a difference locally.”

“ They have shown me a really good example of how to be a good leader and how to encourage people.”

“ She's just an all round wonderful, caring person. A friend, a mentor, a mother.”

“ She is definitely the type of leader and person I wish to be.”

“ He is always organising new projects and opportunities for young people in the area.”

If you could change one thing to make a positive difference to youth work in Scotland, what would it be?

Funding

“A stable budget. Youth work services are constantly under threat of cuts or reduced funding and it is hard to keep the services running. Many are being forced to close or reduce services and it is having severe negative impacts.”

“Increase funding. Youth work has had a major hit in funding over the past couple of years, by ring-fencing additional funds it could help so many young people reach their full potential.”

“Ensure that every young person is aware of it and has a chance to become involved in it - there are too many people who are suffering due to a lack of it.”

Awareness

“Spread the word that youth group is for everyone and there is something in it for each person.”

“Youth Work needs to be made more accessible in all areas of Scotland and not just towns and cities.”

Accessibility

“More youth services in rural areas as well as areas of deprivation.”

Youth Workers

“Give youth workers the funding and the recognition that they deserve. Also any positions within youth work should have young people on the interview panel.”

“Spread more awareness about it and make sure everyone has amazing youth workers just like I have. Make sure that youth work never dies, and that the government looks at it more seriously so that it doesn't affect it in any way.”

“I would just love to see more of it! It was a very rewarding part of my life and I sometimes feel sorry not everyone has the same opportunities to be part of it. More programmes and initiatives covering many different things would be amazing.”

Opportunities to get involved

“More meet ups between groups to strengthen friendships.”

“Show and make adults aware of the opportunities there is for them to help.”

“More support/ training for youth workers in mental health awareness.”

Training for youth workers

For your information...

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The *Youth Work and Me* research process was managed, and the report authored, by Rosy Burgess, SYP's Events and Campaigns Officer, and the *Youth Work and Me* working group. The front page was illustrated by Wiktoria Orlicka MSYP, and the report was designed by Rachel Ashenden, SYP's Communications Officer.



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