



# YOUTH WORK

# AND ME

August 2023



# INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) published '*Youth Work and Me*', a report outlining young people's experiences of youth work in Scotland (available [here](#)). This report highlighted how youth work has changed young people's lives, and the impact youth work budget cuts were having on young people in Scotland.

Since our first *Youth Work and Me* report was published, the lives of young people have dramatically changed. The past four years have seen a global pandemic, major disruptions to our education system, increasing concerns about the climate emergency, a growing mental health epidemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and many other changes in our day to day lives. Throughout this time, youth work across Scotland has continued to deliver essential support to thousands of young people, despite increasing funding challenges.

In July 2023, at SYP's 79th National Sitting in Orkney, 86 members of SYP (MSYPs) - young people aged 14 to 25 - took part in a consultation workshop to discuss their experiences of youth work. This report outlines the findings from their discussions.

## MSYPS TOLD US...

1. Youth work is important because it gives young people new experiences, skills, support, friendships, opportunities to make change, and more confidence.
2. If youth work did not exist, MSYPs think there would be more loneliness and isolation, mental health problems, boredom, crime and anti-social behaviour, discrimination against young people. They also think there would be less opportunities, support, confidence, sense of and links to a community, and youth participation in decision making.
3. To make a positive difference to youth work in Scotland, MSYPs would like to see more funding and support for youth work to be delivered across Scotland, more opportunities to get involved, improved promotion of opportunities, and better accessibility and inclusion for all young people.

'Local youth work should be invested in by national and local government and protected by law from budget cuts.'

(75% agree,  
From Scotland's Young  
People manifesto,  
November 2020)

# WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

## MSYPS TOLD US YOUTH WORK IS...

"Informal education and involvement in the community for young people aged 14-25."

"The goal to improve the lives and wellbeing of young people to give them a better future."

"Dedicated adults helping young people do the best they can to make change."

"Giving young people opportunities and inspiring them to bring about change."

"A tool to improve and enrich the lives of young people through support and opportunities."

"A way for young people to come out of their shell, express themselves and develop their skills. Youth voice doesn't always lead to change but simply having the groups there is great for skills development."

"Improving relationships between generations and removing the stigma that young people are always up to no good."

"Creating a safe space for young people to be themselves."

# WHY IS YOUTH WORK IMPORTANT TO YOU?

At the start of the workshop, MSYPs were asked to move around the room to stand by a sign which best represented how they felt about a number of different statements. Their responses are shown below, along with quotes responding to the question 'why is youth work important to you?'

## YOUTH WORK CHANGES LIVES

All MSYPs agreed (45.2%) or strongly agreed (54.8%) with the statement 'youth work changes lives'.

"Youth work turned my life around, coming out of covid lockdown my life wasn't going in the greatest direction, and getting involved changed my life. It's something that is so important to me and my constituents, and is also my job."

"It gave me the opportunity to express myself, become confident, make friends, help others through volunteering and youth voice groups, and improve my future greatly."

"Youth work is the reason I have more confidence and things like SYP have made me the person I am today - without it my life would look a lot different"

## YOUTH WORK HAS GIVEN ME NEW EXPERIENCES

All MSYPs agreed (13.6%) or strongly agreed (86.4%) with the statement 'youth work has given me new experiences'.

"It's allowed me to grow as a person and feel valued - given me a chance to explore opportunities that I would never have dreamed of before."

"Getting involved at a young age encouraged me to pursue politics at uni / as a career."

## YOUTH WORK IS ACCESSIBLE FOR ME

Three fifths of MSYPs agreed (41.5%) or strongly agreed (19.5%) with the statement 'Youth work is accessible for me', while 36.6% disagreed and 2.4% strongly disagreed with this statement.

"It gives me a sense of belonging as an immigrant."

# WHY IS YOUTH WORK IMPORTANT TO YOU?

## I HAVE MET NEW PEOPLE AND MADE NEW FRIENDS THROUGH YOUTH WORK

Most MSYPs agreed (3.9%) or strongly agreed (82.4%) with the statement 'I have met new people and made new friends through youth work', although 13.7% disagreed with this statement.

"Youth work doesn't just change the lives of those involved - but also brings the community together."

"It creates opportunities for people from different areas to meet new people."

## YOUTH WORK HAS BENEFITED MY HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Most MSYPs agreed (48.8%) or strongly agreed (39.5%) with the statement 'Youth work has benefited my health and wellbeing', although 11.6% disagreed with this statement.

"It gives me and other young people the opportunity to express ourselves in a non-judgmental environment."

"Being able to express what appears to you as 'niche' issues - things that aren't as openly spoken about in public"

"I have received financial and emotional support."



# WHY IS YOUTH WORK IMPORTANT TO YOU?

## I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INFLUENCE CHANGE BECAUSE OF YOUTH WORK

Around two thirds of MSYPs agreed (45.2%) or strongly agreed (23.8%) with the statement 'I have been able to influence change because of youth work'.

"It can give those who are under-represented a voice and a chance to make a positive difference."

"Youth workers are individuals trained and enthusiastic about changing lives and supporting future leaders and populations. They change the course of history."

## I HAVE ACCESS TO ALL THE YOUTH WORK OPPORTUNITIES I WANT

Two thirds of MSYPs agreed (52.5%) or strongly agreed (10.0%) with the statement 'I have access to all the youth work opportunities I want', although one third (37.5%) disagreed with this statement.

"Ensure that young people are supported within their communities and can access opportunities to broaden skills and life experience to the full."

## I KNOW WHERE TO FIND OUT ABOUT YOUTH WORK OPPORTUNITIES

While less than a third of MSYPs agreed (26.6%) or strongly agreed (4.8%) with the statement 'I know where to find out about youth work opportunities', the majority of MSYPs disagreed (61.9%) or strongly disagreed (7.1%) with this statement.

"When found, it gives people opportunities that other services can't - young carers and care experienced [young people] are impacted by this a lot..."

# WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THERE WAS NO YOUTH WORK IN YOUR AREA?

## MSYPS TOLD US THERE WOULD BE MORE..

### **Loneliness and isolation:**

“People may feel lonely without the friendships it brings”

“Many young people would suffer from loneliness and feel like they don't belong because they don't get to socialise with like-minded people”

“I would never have met the amazing youth workers and young people who inspire me daily”

### **Mental health problems:**

“There would be a lot more issues regarding mental health and young people would struggle to accept themselves and may not learn positive attitudes”

“No participation, no support, apathy, depression very prevalent”

“Nobody would take part in decisions, young people would burn out very quickly”

### **Boredom:**

“young people would be bored and when they are bored they get into trouble with the police and their communities”

### **Crime and anti-social behaviour:**

“Young people would engage in anti-social activity to entertain themselves”

“Young people would be more reckless, because there wouldn't be many outlets”

### **Discrimination:**

“Young people would be hugely discriminated against and blamed for anti-social behaviour”

# WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THERE WAS NO YOUTH WORK IN YOUR AREA?

## MSYPS TOLD US THERE WOULD BE LESS...

### Opportunities:

“No upskilling, no confidence, no community, no volunteering, no vibes”

“It would feel like a cap on our future, education, jobs, plans, housing”

### Youth participation in decision-making:

“No participation means lack of respect for decisions, meaning no youth work, means no representation”

“There would be no pressure for adults to consider the opinions of young people”

“Young people would not respect decisions if they don't get listened to”

### Support:

“Supplies for school and every day won't be available to people around the community”

“Young people wouldn't have the support they desperately need”

### Confidence:

“Young people would have less confidence, worse mental health”

“Many young people wouldn't develop into the powerful, confident, and change-seeking young people they are now”

### Sense of belonging:

“Intergenerational learning - bring people closer together irrespective of age”

“Loss of community, especially for rural and [seldom heard] young people”

“There kind of isn't in my area and young people are bored, unhappy and unmotivated. They all want to move away as soon as they can, other than family they have no connection to the areas.”



# IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO YOUTH WORK IN SCOTLAND, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

## MSYPS TOLD US...

### Funding:

“Consistency across councils in terms of funding - eg, some councils can pay for transport, others can't go to [SYP] Sitings”

“Ensure youth work services are available to everyone in Scotland with an increased budget to support every young person”

“Costs should be completely subsidised so it is accessible for all”

### Promotion:

“More promotion of opportunities related to youth work”

“Have one central place you can check where all the opportunities in your local authority.”

### Accessibility:

“Sometimes we have to join online but we dread it because we are never properly included!”

“Come to where young people are, rather than host in council buildings which are intimidating and inaccessible”

“Make it easier to get into the youth work circle - once you're in it, doors open but it can be hard to get to that point”

### Inclusion:

“Eliminate the discrimination that is present for rural communities in the youth work sector”

“Breaking institutional and cultural barriers that work against people of colour and minority groups”

“Build up networks of connection between communities to exchange knowledge and experience as well as to explore ways to more effectively collaborate with other groups”

# IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO YOUTH WORK IN SCOTLAND, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

## MSYPS TOLD US...

### Opportunities to get involved:

“Equal opportunities for everyone, in rural areas and cities”

“More local youth forums / groups in villages / towns”

“Ensure that all schools and public youth environments are encouraging kids to go into youth work, as all kids deserve this opportunity”

“Improve / establish meaningful relationships with decision makers in my local area - if we have ideas for change in the future, they may be more likely to be listened to”

“All year round work (don't stop during summer)”

“Have opportunities like SYP more published and available for school students. Those who don't get elected should have other opportunities within local councils etc - still should be able to make a difference”

### Support for youth work:

“Simplify / streamline all paperwork (bureaucracy slows youth workers down too much)”

“A better framework for councils to follow to help have equal opportunities”

“More collaboration across councils and National Voluntary Organisations”



# ABOUT THE SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

We are a youth-led charity representing all young people aged 12 to 25 in Scotland.

We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights, and ensuring decision makers uphold their rights.

We give young people a national platform to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes in Scotland.

Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament - MSYPs - are aged between 14 and 25. They are elected every two years to represent young people in nine voluntary organisations and every Scottish constituency.

MSYPs listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country, and ensure decision makers listen to them.





**#YouthWorkAndMe**

