

PYOG

Grwp Prif Swyddogion Ieuenctid
Principal Youth Officers' Group

**Emotional wellbeing and mental health
of young people in Wales - what
contribution can youth work make?**

**A discussion paper on behalf of the Wales Principal
Youth Officers' Group**



WLGA • CLILC

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Emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people in Wales - what contribution can youth work make?

Well-being can be a difficult term to define as it is quite subjective, meaning different things to different people in different contexts and on different days. However, it is commonly agreed that a positive physical and mental state (well-being) "*...enables an individual to be able to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life; people in good mental health have the ability to recover effectively from illness, change or misfortune.*" Mental Health Foundation. The better we are able to master our emotions, the greater our capacity to enjoy life, cope with stress, and focus on important personal priorities.

Whilst we all have risk factors present which can create environments for negatively or positively affecting our 'well-being', young people in particular (as they transition from childhood to adulthood) are at a time in their lives when **such risk factors can be amplified due to this transitional phase**. Whilst the adolescent mind and body is developing the robustness required to 'cope', it is also at its most vulnerable with factors such as peer pressure, modern lifestyles, bullying, bereavement, anxiety, familial change etc. all potentially having a profound impact on a young person's self-esteem and ability to learn.

Young people – assets to society

It is commonly accepted that young people today experience far more complex and faster lifestyles than previous generations, with the recent addition of social media meaning that almost everything captured or written is available and is accessible immediately. This can of course have both positive and negative impacts and the key to negotiating this high level assault on the senses and broad range of choice is education – **understanding consequences and learning how to make informed choices**.

In many respects, demands on each new generation seem to grow, with young people increasingly being required to adapt to modern/contemporary environments at a faster pace. They are becoming adults sooner e.g. puberty now commences a few years earlier than the previous generation with their childhood phase being shorter as a result. However, as well as being shaped by their environment, in the new digital age they also have huge **potential to shape it**. With an ageing population becoming more reliant on younger generations, **young people now, more than ever, should be seen as assets to society and communities and social policy needs to reflect this**.

Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) indicates that young people have the right to have a say on matters that affect them. They are able to do this best when offered a framework through which to do so. Organisations working with young people are best placed to facilitate this and, where relevant, to articulate their needs and nurture them as assets, with the Youth Service having a key role to play.

The Youth Service is defined as the framework by which youth work (a profession defined by its own National Occupational Standards and qualifications framework) is delivered.

Whilst there are a number of valued methods of engagement with young people under the umbrella term Youth Support Services, youth work is open to all young people aged 11-25 with its key purpose being to: *"enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full Potential."* (Youth Work National Occupational Standards). It is based on a voluntary engagement and delivered via informal and non-formal education approaches during the period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Youth work is carried out in a variety of settings and through a number of methods, developing a wide range of personal and social (soft) skills, which underpin an individual's voice, influence and contribution to society. Examples of delivery include:

- Arts, drama and culture
- First aid
- Sports and physical activity
- Information, advice & guidance
- Counselling services
- Residentials
- After school clubs
- Citizenship
- Project work
- Duke of Edinburgh Award
- Sustainability
- Global citizenship
- Alternative curriculum programmes
- Health & Well-being

Prevention & early intervention - what is the Youth Service's role?

As a species, humans seek association and belonging whereby they develop feelings of safety and of being a part of something, in turn giving a sense of purpose. Through this association we develop behaviours. Youth work *"...provides or facilitates...places and relationships within which young people can enjoy themselves, feel secure, learn to take greater control of their lives and recognise and resist the damaging influences which may affect them"* [Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes](#). Building relationships has been central both to the rhetoric and practice of youth work with **education for relationships and education through relationship** being important themes. This also often fosters environments more conducive to meeting young people's needs.

Historically, youth work did not develop to 'keep young people off the streets' or to provide amusement and such a perception certainly does not reflect youth work today. As described above, it is based on a principle of non-formal/informal learning with the educative power of playing one's part in a group or association being a defining feature of youth work since its inception, perhaps most strongly articulated

in the Albermarle Report (1960). Traditionally, young people have also been free to enter into (and end) relationships with youth workers when they want.

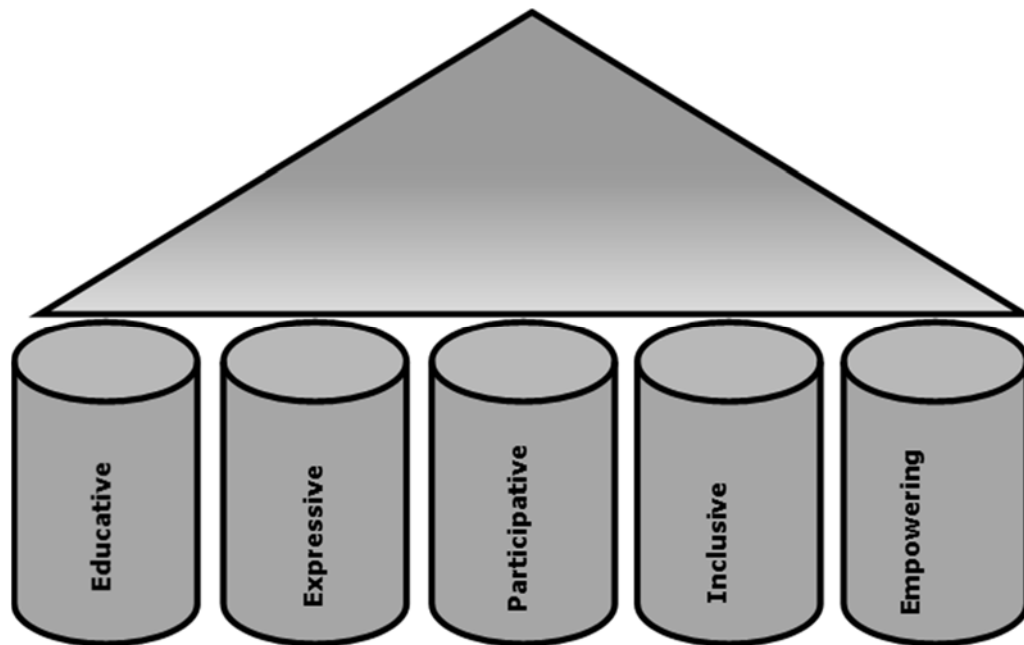
Many “social competencies” are learnt by seeing and doing, by experiencing and failing as well as succeeding – the ability to cope with failure, to bounce back and learn from the experience (resilience). Youth work provides not only opportunities for young people aged 11-25 to build and re-build aspects of their lives, to reflect and evaluate but also provide learning programmes in their own right using different (but complementary) techniques in supportive environments which offers an alternative for young people and to seek to achieve their full potential.

To improve opportunities for developing positive mental health, young people need a strong emotional foundation, built on self-awareness, empathy, resilience and self-efficacy. Many of these traits are developed during young people’s time in formal education (schools/further and higher education) but, given that that they spend **around 85% of their waking time outside of formal education** (Professor Tim Brighouse *Education without failure*, The Royal Society of Arts Digital Journal, Autumn 2008), there are also numerous opportunities within communities and leisure time to do so.

The *Learning & Skills Act* (2000) conferred on local authorities the requirement to ‘provide, secure or participate in’ Youth Support Services. The subsequent Directions and Guidance document *Extending Entitlement (2002)* provides the framework by which this is delivered – known as the 10 Entitlements:

1. Education, training and work experience – tailored to their needs.
2. Basic skills which open doors to a full life and promote social inclusion.
3. A wide and varied range of opportunities to participate in volunteering and active citizenship.
4. High quality, responsive and accessible services and facilities.
5. Independent specialist careers advice, guidance, student support and counselling services.
6. Personal support and advice – where and when they need it – with clear grounds on confidentiality.
7. Advice on health, housing benefits and other issues provided in an accessible and welcoming setting.
8. Recreational and social opportunities in a safe and accessible environment.
9. Sporting artistic, musical and outdoor experiences to develop talents, broaden horizons and promote rounded perspectives including both national and international contexts.
10. The right to be consulted, to participate in decision making, and to be heard, on all matters which concern them or have an impact on their lives.

The Youth Service makes a major contribution to this via five 'pillars' or values, as described in *YWiW: Principles & Purposes*:



Youth services act as an important preventative service, often **keeping a young person from getting to a critical point** where further interventions e.g. social services, housing, CAMHS, police etc. are required. By working closely with a young person, helping them navigate through their difficulties and experiences, the need for more acute and expensive interventions is often avoided.

However, many young people using youth services are already disengaged from mainstream services and are often vulnerable. Some are currently in the care of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or social services, others perhaps need to be but do not have the motivation or ability to seek help. As well as assisting young people to become self-sufficient and interdependent, **youth workers are also competent advocates**, acting in the best interests of the young person whilst aiding the skills developments of that individual.

The Welsh Government's current programme *Together for Children & Young People* (T4CYP) seeks to "...reconfigure emotional and mental health services provided for children and young people in Wales, in line with the principles of prudent healthcare" with an emphasis on prevention. Being involved with young people between the ages of 11-25, **youth workers are often the only constant for a young person** engaging with specialist services such as *Independent Counselling Services* and/or CAMHS – they can and do act as a broker of services as well as often being the only provision available at the exit point from such services.

How are youth workers contributing to young people's emotional well-being?

Together for Mental Health: A Strategy for Mental Health & Wellbeing in Wales, the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* and the *Social Services & Well-being Act (2014)* all provide a framework for collaborative working and opportunities for preventative services in particular to make an increased contribution to this important agenda. The PYOG has carried out a mapping exercise including the contribution of youth work to the *Future Generations Act*, much of which is relevant to the promotion of improved emotional well-being:

Goal	Examples of contribution
A prosperous Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Young people are able to take a leadership or supportive role through junior leader and peer education schemes. ➤ Youth Forums & Councils provide a platform for young people to express their views and gain acknowledgment. ➤ Development of wider employment skill sets e.g. communication, team work, inter-personal skills, leadership skills ➤ Young people encouraged to play a positive role in their communities ➤ Providing opportunities to participate, regardless of background ➤ Broadening horizons and raising aspirations by providing new and challenging experiences ➤ Developing employability skills which encourage young people's progression ➤ Youth Work in schools - promoting the engagement of young people ➤ Links with Communities First Action Plans
A resilient Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Self esteem, anti bullying projects. ➤ Confidence - raising activities with young people ➤ Individual, tailored support within schools for most vulnerable
A healthier Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Healthy eating programmes ➤ Time and location flexible sex and relationship Education ➤ (Condom) C-card scheme ➤ Substance misuse programmes ➤ Up-to-date and good quality information and advice
A more equal Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promoting equality and diversity and challenging oppression is a central function of youth work ➤ Intergenerational work ➤ Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender information and awareness ➤ Disability awareness ➤ Combating and challenging hate crime/extremism

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Anti-discrimination practice ➤ Developing self-esteem and resilience ➤ Developing social inclusion ➤ Balance of targeted and open access provision ➤ Outreach/detached provision to offer equal opportunities for young people in “hard-to-reach” communities such as traveller communities, home schooled pupils etc.
A Wales of cohesive communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learning “soft” skills and essential skills needed to sustain communities ➤ Gaining an understanding of mutual support and the needs of others ➤ Participation in positive activities ➤ Environmental improvement projects ➤ Duke of Edinburgh Award citizenship/volunteering
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Eisteddfodau, theatre workshops, youth exchanges ➤ Events held through the medium of Welsh, production of Welsh medium literature ➤ Delivery of youth work and training/learning opportunities through the medium of the Welsh language
A globally responsible Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth exchanges ➤ Global citizenship projects ➤ Cultural and identity awareness programmes ➤ Environment programmes ➤ Partnership work with organisations such as menter iaith

The Youth Service also delivers **workshops and a great deal of training** for individuals and organisations around subjects such as:

- Healthy relationships
- Sex Education
- Men’s health
- UNCRC
- Women’s health
- Self-esteem
- Body image
- Healthy eating
- Bullying
- Exam stress
- Anger management
- Sexuality & Gender dysphoria
- Healthy lifestyles
- Smoking awareness
- Alcohol and substance misuse awareness
- Parenting
- Stress and relaxation
- Money management
- Employability
- Mind management
- Online safety
- Assertiveness
- Prejudice & discrimination awareness

Through the new vulnerability assessment profiling (VAP) tools being used locally as part of the [Youth Engagement & Progression Frameworks](#), young people are

increasingly being identified as presenting with mental health indicators, without having a diagnosis and falling short of CAMHS criteria. To assist these young people, wellbeing drop-in sessions are also available widely. These can often be multi-agency provisions designed to be one-stop-shops for young people to access a range of support, dependent on their needs. Open access youth provision, such as detached, street based and centre based youth work play an invaluable role in identifying and tracking young people who are often disengaged from mainstream education. Many of these young people also engage with youth work professionals outside of an educational context, which can be a valuable link to feed information into VAP tools within the YEPF.

Whilst arrangements differ across local authorities and across regions, youth workers have a strong tradition in relation to links between them and health practitioners, with services co-located in some areas. The Youth Services in the Aneurin Bevan Health Board area have also developed a joint Health & Well-being toolkit for practitioners in conjunction with the Aneurin Bevan Public Health Team. The aim of the toolkit is to "*...provide practical guidelines for setting up and running health-related workshops for young people between 11 – 25 years of age, in informal settings.*" The toolkit includes clear guidance on how to use and deliver it in group settings and through one-to-one work, with the emotional health section focussing on the "Five ways to well-being" model - *Connect* (with the people around you); *Be Active*; *Take Notice* (be curious); *Keep Learning*; and *Give*.

The Youth Service also often has strong links with School Nurses, providing information and access to the C-Card scheme. School nurses also provide 'drop-in' services at local youth centres.

Youth work making a difference

Historically, the evidence base for the significance of social and emotional capabilities has been challenging, if not elusive e.g. there has been a lack of consensus around language and definitions. This can lead to a greater focus on 'hard' measurements such as qualifications and accreditation, which do not take into account progress in relation to health, well-being and other crucial personal/social traits. However, there are some effective tools for measuring young people's well-being, a number of which are used at the beginning of a young person's involvement with youth work and via periodical reviews.

For example, given the close working relationships between youth work and counselling services in some areas, similar measurement tools are used e.g. the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), YP CORE and Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. Other examples of distance travelled measurement tools used to assess progress/impact are Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS), which assists in designing appropriate interventions based on the young person's declaration of their attitudes and views both inside and outside school. The findings of the PASS assessment are discussed with the young person, they identify key areas to work on together and complete an action plan in how they will do this, what support is

needed, time-frames etc. Rickter scale, Outcomes Star and Demonstrating Success are other useful tools. In the context of using such tools, practitioners are mindful that measuring young people's progress needs to be proportionate to the relationship journey, and resulting/ongoing intervention.