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## The Role of Open Access Youth Work in improving outcomes for the next generation of Young People as part of a Holistic Approach

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*Academic Research Paper – Commissioned by Surrey County Council as part of ‘Delivering Differently for Young People’ programme*

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## Executive Summary

This report reviews the potential role of 'open access' youth work in improving outcomes for the next generation of young people as part of a holistic approach. It does this by focusing on the needs of young people and the current constraints on the provision of Youth Services and more broadly services for youths. Considerations of the economic value of services for youth is reviewed alongside developing models of the relative roles of voluntary and statutory services, and the role of services and partnerships for service across the public and private divide. The research literature is reviewed and while it is clear there are methodological limitations on empirical work in this area, there are indications of the characteristics of good practice. A key theme throughout the report is a focus on how services are delivered rather than what services are delivered. The role of social media in supporting the development of open access services at different stages is presented as an example of the importance of a nuanced, evidence-based approach to delivery. The involvement of young people in services designed for them both in general and in relation specifically to drop-in services is highlighted. A set of conclusions based on the policies, practices and research literature leads to a set of actions recommended as crucial considerations for any attempt to develop and promote high level provision in this area. These are focused on action in relation to the contexts in which such services operate, the service network design, the centre design and stakeholder engagement. The report concludes that open access youth work does indeed have a key role to play in the future of services for young people if appropriately designed, supported and resourced.

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## The need for effective services for young people

A New Economics Foundation (NEF) report *Improving Services for Young People: An Economic Perspective* (2011) emphasized how public services do not deal well with young people after the age of 16. Even well-targeted and coordinated services eventually fall away, potentially leaving young people both vulnerable and struggling. Approximately 200,000 young people nationally face significant long-term detrimental consequences for their economic, physical and emotional wellbeing. Additionally, there are potentially very substantial costs for the state as a result of their ill-health and dependence on welfare.

According to the Bristol report for ACEVO (2012) there are approximately 1.5 million 16- to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) – which amounts to approximately 20% of all young people. Similarly, the Labour Force Survey for the same period indicates that over a quarter of a million young people had been looking for work for a year or more.

An Institute of Public Policy Research analysis of the Office of National Statistics data from Q1–Q4 2013 indicates that the recession hit young people disproportionately hard, but also that youth unemployment had already been rising since the early 2000s, when the economy was strong. Despite initial indications of macroeconomic recovery, by the end of 2013 around 450,000 young people aged 18 to 21 were not in education, employment or training. Among the wider group of 18–24-year-olds who were NEET, 45 per cent did not hold a GCSE-level qualification. Additionally, 24 per cent had never had a job. They point out that the cost of leaving school without qualifications (or experience of work) has been increasing for a long time. It has been argued that the effects of these trends are exacerbated rather than compensated for by a welfare system designed for those who have lost their jobs rather than for those who have yet to work at all (IPPR, 2014, *'The Condition of Britain'*).

Several analyses have attempted to estimate the cost of the impact of inadequate support for young people. The complexity of assessing costs, the interdependency causal factors, and the difficulty of estimating future resource needs makes all such estimates problematic to a greater or lesser extent. However, there is no doubt that the costs are high, recurrent and arguably ultimately unsustainable. According to the Bristol report, youth unemployment in the UK cost the country £4.8 billion in 2012 — more than the entire budget for educating 16 to-19-year-olds. On top of this can be added £10.7 billion in lost output for the same year. In addition to this is the further estimated cost of crime at an additional £1 billion each year. When losses related to future productivity and reliance on the welfare state are factored in, the costs become even higher. The net present value of the cost to the taxpayer of such demands even considering only a decade ahead, is estimated at approximately £28 billion. In addition, there is a clear recognition that the legacy effects cannot be ignored as future generations of young people fall into progressively more difficult circumstances.

Whatever the costs to economy and the public purse the impact on young people who are outside of mainstream education, training or work itself is significant. Financially, they are likely to be paid less in later life; with the average young unemployed person earning £1,800



– £3,300 less per year by their early thirties through the scarring effects of youth unemployment compared to their engaged peers (Gregg & Tominey, 2005).

### The role of youth services – and youth workers

The role of youth workers has changed over the years but to some extent the underlying principles have remained constant. Merton et al (2004) highlighted some of the key features which informed their landmark view of research and practice:

*"Youth workers engage with young people by building relationships of trust and mutual respect. Their principal roles are those of social educator, guide and mentor. They offer learning, support and challenge to young people, and encourage them to make informed decisions."*

*"At the same time, they advocate on young people's behalf when necessary with other services, groups and agencies. In this way youth workers can perform complementary roles to many Personal Advisers in the Connexions Service. However, youth workers have a distinctive educational purpose and work with young people as members of groups and communities. Through our empirical analysis, we explore in detail the characteristics of the youth work role in fostering young people's personal and social development and, through this, its contribution to building social capital."*

Merton goes on to describe potential 'limiting factors which inhibit effective intervention and support:

- Negative influence of family, friends and communities.
- Problematic relationships with schools
- The management, support and development of youth workers.
- The short-term nature of funding for some youth work can also serve to inhibit its impact by undermining stability and sustainability.

Finally, in terms of the enduring fundamentals of youth work, Merton distinguishes between 'primary' and 'secondary' changes. While this distinction now more than ever is less clear cut, the underlying notion of immediate proximal impact and subsequent more distal influence remains valid.

- **Primary changes** – changes in attitudes, feelings and behaviour. For example, an outdoor adventure activity might challenge a group of young people to develop new skills, and the confidence this engenders might easily be transferred to their lives back in school and the local community; or an intervention or activity that has really engaged a group of young people may lead them to review their attitudes towards further education, training and employment on leaving school; they may even change



their behaviour and set about looking for opportunities rather than staying disengaged.

- **Secondary changes** – changes to a young person's situation that are conditional on those primary changes: for example, if the group of young people just mentioned find a job or a training scheme or re-engage with school, then there has been a change in their situation or condition.

More recently there have been concerns expressed from a variety of quarters that the current reductions in public spending in areas such as youth services is not temporary but part of broader structural change to the relationship between the state and social care services. One of the consequences of reduced funding is the bureaucratic burden that attends increased monitoring of investment sometimes at the expense of the client-professional relationship (Hughes, Cooper, Gormally and Rippingale, 2014). There is some evidence that youth workers can have a more effective relationship with vulnerable young people than might occasionally be the case with some professionals. Has highlighted in the Casey Report of child abuse in Rotherham, a failure to value the views of youth workers about vulnerable children may have contributed to failings.

*"There was a professional jealousy of youth services by social care which was very clear to the Inspection team. This attitude persisted despite the obvious contrast between the power and size of children social care as opposed to a small team of youth workers...The social care line was that these were non-social workers who didn't know what they were doing." A former senior officer"*

*Casey Report pp43-44*

### Services for youths, youth services and cuts to public funding – which functions are being

More recently the assessment of the effectiveness of the value of Youth Services has been closely tied up with debates around local authority priorities in the context of public sector cuts. It has been argued that public sector and welfare cuts under governments' austerity programmes in both the UK and Ireland have had a regressive impact on policy implementation and third-sector activity across a range of areas, affecting those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised in society (Featherstone et al, 2012). Under such conditions, it is argued that the 'Big Society' reforms will have a very limited impact.

Other reports have also argued that there is a simultaneous shrinking of the services targeted at dealing with youth marginalisation at the point in the economic cycle where young people are facing challenges around poverty and marginalisation.



*"Many contributors to the Commission made similar arguments for the value of high quality youth work. But much of this kind of provision for young people is being discontinued as a result of funding cuts: the Education Select Committee has raised alarm at cuts to youth services in 2011 (which in some local council areas have been up to 70, 80 or even 100%)."* (ACEVO Report 2012)

While local authorities have a statutory duty to provide some educational and recreational leisure time activities the precise nature of these activities and how they are to be delivered is not specified.

The Education and Inspections Act (2006) makes this clear:

*"Education and Inspections Act 2006 507B LEAs in England: functions in respect of leisure-time activities etc for persons aged 13 to 19 and certain persons aged 20 to 24 (1)A local education authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure for qualifying young persons in the authority's area access to— (a) sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities; and (b) sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities."*

In particular it is important to recognise that while there is a statutory duty confirmed by the Act to provide services to youths, there is no statutory duty to provide fund a dedicated 'Youth Service' per se.

In this context, the Education Select Committee report in June 2011 noted that youth services, broadly construed, have historically been funded from a number of different central government and local authority budgets, as well as from a range of charitable and private sector sources and individual fundraising for many years. Until April 2011, a key funding source for local authority youth services was the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), the overall grant to local authorities administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The range of funding streams which fed into services for youths which have been largely dissolved were wide and highly differentiated. According to the Education Select Committee in 2010-11 central government provided a number of additional grants to local authorities, including the Youth Opportunity Fund (£40.75m in 2010-11), the Youth Crime Action Plan (£11.98m in 2010-11), Challenge and Support (£3.9m in 2010-11), Intensive Intervention Grant (£2.8m in 2010-11), the Children's Fund (£131.80m in 2010-11), the Positive Activities for Young People Programme (£94.5m in 2010-11), Youth Taskforce (£4.34m in 2010-11), Young People Substance Misuse (£7.0m in 2010-11) and Teenage Pregnancy (£27.5m in 2010-11). It notes that these additional targeted funds represent a significant proportion of overall funding of youth services in recent years.



Even though direct grant funding and specialist streams have been cut to a greater or lesser extent, local authorities have considerable discretion in precisely how budget reductions are managed. The Government's own Local Authority Youth Services Survey (LAYSS) in 2013 provides further confirmation of the scale and impact of cuts to Youth Services and the range of measures Local Authorities are taking to meet the challenge of austerity. Interestingly, the data provide a useful breakdown in where cuts are being made illustrating different responses to resource reduction. The variation in the "paring profile" indicates that the overall reduction in local authority funding is being refracted through local authority decisions, leading to different experiences by services and service users nationally.

Overall 98 local authorities out of 154 contacted responded to the LAYSS survey, yielding a relatively high response rate for this type of review of just over 60%.

The survey was commissioned by the Cabinet Office to secure an understanding centrally from those charged with delivering services about how funding reductions are being managed on the ground and specifically of how local authorities were "meeting their statutory duty by securing services and activities for young people to improve their wellbeing". No noticeable patterns were observed across those youth services teams that did not respond compared to those who did.

It is clear that at a macro level there is a shift away from general services and towards targeted services. For example in one section local authorities were asked to highlight:

*How much does your council spend on universal services and targeted services for young people (as returned to the Department for Education under Section 251 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Learning and Children's Act (2009))?*

<b>Table 1: Total £s spent on services in 98 Local Authorities</b>			
	<u>Targeted services</u>	<u>General Services</u>	<u>T/G Ratio</u>
2011-2012	214,835,258	265,257,976	0.8
2012-2013	227,500,261	199,293,254	1.1
2013-2014	195,871,400	177,285,841	1.1

It can be also seen from the data in the LAYSS returns that in addition to a 12% cut overall there is a significant shift away from general to targeted services. The 2013-14 reduction maintained that ratio but there is no assumption that this will stabilise.

Consideration of expenditure by service reveals that while there was a 21.8% reduction in expenditure overall where allocated to specific services, the cuts were not uniformly applied. The biggest reductions were in discretionary awards (78.2%) while student support almost doubled. Table 2 presents the full breakdown of the spending profile. This comparative analysis has been prepared for this report and is based on the published Cabinet office data.





<b>Table 2: Breakdown of reported expenditure by Local Authorities on Services for Young People 2011-14</b>				
<b>Expenditure by Category for 98 LAs reporting [£s]</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013- 2014</b>	<b>13-14 v 11-12</b>
Youth work	156,681,216	173,613,743	124,464,377	-20.6
Activities for young people	34,859,186	28,822,186	18,933,783	-45.7
Services to support young people's participation in education or training	59,966,806	55,443,704	50,244,580	-16.2
Substance misuse services	13,774,062	15,353,325	13,495,785	-2.0
Teenage pregnancy services	6,618,057	6,640,666	7,540,854	13.9
Discretionary awards	7,347,965	2,661,000	1,600,000	-78.2
Student support	661,400	1,433,002	1,289,000	94.9
Information advice and guidance	50,559,192	43,827,277	36,330,647	-28.1
Young people's participation	11,043,607	11,839,483	13,384,148	21.2
Other	65,138,903	52,902,367	50,700,937	-22.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>406,650,394</b>	<b>406,650,394</b>	<b>406,650,394</b>	<b>-21.8</b>
<b>Year on year reduction (%)</b>		<b>3.5%</b>	<b>19%</b>	

Interestingly the Cabinet office data indicate that despite reductions in spending LAs estimated that in some areas services had improved, most notably in the category of 'Capacity to form partnerships'. These data are presented as Table 3.



*Table 3. Reported impact of cuts on quality as assessed by Local Authorities.*

	<b>Has got considerably worse</b>	<b>Somewhat worse</b>	<b>Neither improved nor worse</b>	<b>Improved</b>	<b>Considerably improved</b>
Skills and professionalism of staff	3	8	31	46	9
Capacity to form partnerships	0	3	16	54	24
Focus on outcomes	0	3	11	66	17
Somewhat Achievement of outcomes	0	6	34	48	9
Identifying need/targeting resources	0	1	21	58	17
Measurement of impact	0	5	37	49	6
Quality of experience for young people	1	7	40	42	7

In terms of overall trends there would appear to be continuing squeeze on local authority funding which will further reduce their capacity to support services for young people.

The Local Government Association estimates that Councils in England could face a £3.3 billion reduction in central government funding for local services in 2016/17 - equivalent to some 12 per cent of their total budgets. It predicts this will leave councils facing a funding gap of £9.5 billion by the end of the decade. The challenges facing the successful delivery of such services are in some respects the most difficult for a generation.

It is also clear that funding is not only being reduced; the way the funding is being used is changing. In 2011-12 targeted youth services accounted for approximately 45% of the overall youth spend; by the end of 2013-14 it had risen to around 52%.

In 2014 the Cabinet Office launched a new initiative called 'Delivering Differently for Young people' which seeks to identify new models of delivery for youth services and has recently funded a series of pilot studies to assess what might and might not work in different local contexts. This £500,000 programme has provided 10 local authorities with £50,000 to support the review a range of new delivery models supporting them to secure services and



activities for young people aged 13 to 19 to improve their wellbeing. The variety of possible models includes public service mutuals, a partnership delivery with the VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise sector), and partnerships with community groups and public-private partnerships.

### Economic assessments of change: addressing the challenge of young people's needs

The benefits of helping young people in need, including but not limited to those caught in a cycle of lack of training, lack of earning, lack of access to training, lack of economic empowerment generally in human and emotional terms is significant. However, what are the benefits in economic terms for the taxpayer, the services and young people themselves of addressing the needs of young people? The National Economics Foundation (NEF) claims that "By giving young people with complex needs the support they need, it would be possible to improve their life chances, i.e. reduce their negative outcomes. If by supporting them, the amount that these young people cost society was no more than the cost of an 'average' 16-25 year old, then the potential value generated for the young people themselves, for young parents and their children, and for the state, would be £3.2 billion. Of this:

- W for **young people themselves**, savings are estimated to be £1.3 billion, made up of
  - W reductions in their drug misuse,
  - W increased employment
- W for **young parents and their children**, additional value is forecast to be £490 million,
  - W as a result of being better able to look after their child
  - W general savings in care
- W a value for the **taxpayer** at £1.4 billion over five years
  - W the state comes from gains such as less money spent on putting young people in prison as offending rates are reduced,
  - W more young people having jobs and being in training, and
  - W fewer young people making demands on emergency services and mental health services.
  - W more stable young parents and therefore fewer of their children going into care."

NEF estimated a saving of around £730 million over the five-year period from reduced duplication in services. They argue the savings would be then reinvested for more one-to-one support to ensure an improvement in the lives of young people with complex needs.

Quite apart from the detriment to the individual, cutting youth services has been argued to be a false economy in terms of the national finances. Treasury estimates as of March 2015 indicate that each young person taken out of NEET status saves the public purse over £4500 per annum while each reduction in school exclusions saves a Local Authority around £11,500



with the annual savings associated with a young person not going into care is over £50k per annum (2013-14 figures).

### The role of the voluntary sector

Traditionally the responsibilities for the delivery of youth services have been allocated to and delivered by public bodies, principally local authorities as confirmed under the 2006 Act. However there has always been a significant contribution made by the voluntary sector, usually through charitable bodies alongside faith and community groups. The role of the voluntary sector has changed considerably over the last 20 years with various forms of partnership, funding and visibility being promoted and contested. There has been a corresponding political framing of the involvement of voluntary sector in service delivery and policy development ranging from the 'Big Society' concept of 2010 to the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. But what role might the voluntary sector have in the provision of services for youths in the future?

There are over 160,000 registered charities, and an estimated 900,000 civil society organisations in the UK overall. For the last two decades, if not before there have been proposals that these organizations can fill a 'care gap' caused by gradual reduction in public sector community facing care services. However, the issue is increasingly seen as one of how such gaps can be prevented in the first place (Hutton, et al , 2014)

*"Communities need pluralism: they need many organisations between the state and the individual to ensure their health and sustainability. A plural society recognises that the need of each community is unique. It promotes a fluid dialogue between those within a community and between communities – and indeed between communities and government."*

*(Hutton et al, 2014)*

Overall, approximately 40,000 voluntary sector organisations receive statutory funding. Larger organisations are much more likely to receive funding, with approximately 70% of major and 68% of large charities receiving an income from government. However, by comparison only 12% of micro organisations are recipients. A Foundation of Social Improvement survey of over 300 small charities found that 60% had not held a contract to deliver public services at any time.

*"Our discourse around public services has not evolved to encompass the debate we need to have around quality and kinds of care. It is an individualistic dialogue, focussed on how the state can promote a person's capacity to help themselves, rather than their capacity and will to help others. We lack the language with which to describe a world in which public services seek to promote a "good society", where public servants are motivated to go beyond their basic duties in order to bring about the maximum benefits for everyone in their care."*

*(Hutton et al, 2014)*

For Hutton the key issues are around the extent to which there is a 'care deficit' in public services and whether or not the state can remedy this deficit alone. It is recognized that



historically and prospectively there are many different models of partnership between voluntary and public sector bodies but how should the voluntary sector describe its contribution to overcoming the care deficit. Hutton et al argue that is appropriate now to use the language of rights and human dignity. One model that is offered involves the five “one nation” principles offered by Jon Cruddas of transformation, prevention, devolution, collaboration and cooperation. “A new language is out there, concepts that form the bedrock for creating a discourse beyond ‘choice and competition’” says Hutton, “just need to find it.”

In a similar vein a landmark report by the Institute for Public Policy Research has recently published an analysis of how the public sector and voluntary agencies can work together to foster effective collaboration to support individuals, families and young people in need. The June 2014 report *‘The Condition of Britain: Strategies for Social Renewal’* sets out an agenda for “reforming the state and social policy to enable people in Britain to work together to build a stronger society in tough times”.<sup>1</sup>

A key focus of their approach to politics and public action is that it is driven by the goals of spreading power, fostering contribution and strengthening shared institutions.

*“Covering a wide range of policy issues, it makes proposals for reshaping the systems of support for families, young people, older people and those facing deep exclusion from society, while also setting out reforms to social security, employment support and housing policy. The agenda laid out here is ambitious and optimistic, rooted in today’s challenges while learning the lessons of the past.”*

The report attempts to addresses in a coherent fashion key issue facing the UK in a range of social policy issues including family life, young people’s transitions into adulthood, social security, housing, crime, social exclusion, and older people’s care. The priorities highlighted by the IPPR can be argued to be particularly of relevance to the challenges facing commissioners and providers of services for young people, particularly in the context of financial constraints, a rapidly changing economic base, technological developments and a new recognition of the vulnerability of children and young people emotionally, educationally and economically. Before turning to the specific recommendations of the ‘Condition’ Report it is worth briefly reviewing the overarching principles which drive their vision of well-being in the UK. First and foremost the analysis of ‘Condition’ begins with a clear centring of ‘equality’ as an orientating principle. Specifically equality which is characterized by

- *A more equal **distribution** of power: committing to spreading power out to people and places, rather than following the instinctive preference for acting at scale through the central state. This is essential not only to counter concentrations of power in the state or the market but also to realize the potential of people to come together to solve their own problems.*

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note the support for the approach highlighted by this empirically-driven analysis from across the political spectrum “An impressive, radical blueprint” - The Independent; “Epic” – The Guardian; “A landmark study” – The Sunday Times; “a Magna Carta for social democracy in the 21st century” Daily Telegraph.



- Greater recognition of **individual agency**: replacing the tendency towards paternalism with a commitment to personal freedom and mutual responsibility. This is a necessary condition for human flourishing, but is also the means of achieving more effective, meaningful and lasting change. Excessive dependency on others prevents us acting together as equal citizens.
- Deeper **democratic control**: countering unease about the messiness and contingency of democracy with a commitment to render power accountable. This would reflect the importance of winning consent to legitimise action and ensure that politics is driven by the concerns of everyday life, rather than those of elites, experts or vested interests.
- **Stronger social relationships**: shifting away from a singular focus on abstract metrics of material equality, and instead committing to an approach that values the expressive and subjective dimensions of life. This reflects the fact that one's position in society only makes sense in relation to others, and that what really matters in life cannot be reduced to the pursuit of a universal or abstract utopia.

In terms of how this model based on dispersed power, personal contribution, and shared endeavour can specifically help inform considerations of youth services, it is necessary to consider their review in 'Young people: Enabling Secure Transactions into Adulthood' (Condition, 2014, Ch 7).

They highlight that the recession has created significant new challenges for young people.

- tuition fees have increased,
- most new apprenticeship places have not benefited them, and
- employers have shown a preference for hiring older rather than younger workers.

Additionally they argue, longer term trends continue to drift against young people's interests particularly but not exclusively in the key areas of:

- housing,
- pensions
- and the labour market

Crucially, they argue, many institutions that traditionally guided young people into adulthood have been eroded or weakened by economic and social change. In particular they highlight the breakdown of systems to support young people not going to university to make the transition from school to work, and in the number of young people who have experienced family breakdown.

In this context they identify three key priorities for any new Government, of whatever political hue for the period 2015-2020:

- **distinct work, training and benefits track for young people** which is separate from the adult welfare system, and which ensures that they complete their basic education and gain proper work experience.



- w to expand the opportunities available to young people to develop the **social and emotional skills** they need for a happy and stable life. Specifically, we argue for greater investment to expand National Citizen Service so that it develops it into an important milestone for increasing numbers of young people – one that fosters personal development, but also brings together people from different backgrounds and nurtures a commitment to social action.
- w to prevent young adults (those aged 18–21) who get involved in antisocial behaviour and minor offending from entering into a **life of crime**.

Interestingly in relation to their review of Youth Offending Teams IPPR highlights the way in which community based supervision is more effective than short custodial sentences.

*"In addition, new community sentences should also be put in place as an alternative to short prison sentences for young adults. Prison must be used for young adults convicted of serious crimes, but short prison sentences are typically ineffective at preventing reoffending, and also disrupt whatever stability offenders may have in their lives (for example, in work or family relationships..). Those issuing community sentences should be able to choose from a fuller range of options, including intensive supervision and monitoring, participation in full-time activity, curfews, or unpaid work experience. The behaviour of young adults on community orders should be regularly reviewed in court, with swift sanctions for non-compliance."*

Unfortunately, the Conditions Report does not draw the link between the advantages of community-based management of young offenders and the opportunities for support and re-entry to training offered by Youth Services in general and open access youth work in particular. There is some useful work to be done in drawing out the implications of this connection and how it might work effectively, supported by liaison between youth service workers and Youth Offending Teams. Indeed this approach would be wholly in line with the overall philosophy of the 'Condition' Report:

*"No amount of social activism can overcome the hopelessness of unemployment, or ensure that working people share in the fruits of rising national wealth. However, social policy and social activism can help create the conditions for prosperity, particularly in supporting employment, enabling family life to flourish, and investing in our productive potential as a country. Furthermore, the right kinds of government intervention and social mobilisation can overcome market failures, such as a lack of affordable housing or the misery of being trapped in a cycle of unaffordable debt. Social and economic renewal must go hand in hand."*

The specific practical proposals of 'Condition' would if implemented have a direct impact on youth services generally with potentially the greatest impact of open access services and their supporting infrastructure:

- w For 18–21-year-olds, existing out-of-work benefits should be replaced by a youth allowance that provides financial support conditional on looking for work or completing education, targeted at those from low-income families.





- *A youth guarantee for 18–21-year-olds should be established that offers access to education or training plus intensive support to find work or an apprenticeship, with compulsory paid work experience for those not earning or learning within six months.*
- *The National Citizen Service programme should be expanded so that half of young people aged 16 and 17 are taking part by 2020, using money saved from holding down cash benefits to families with older children.*
- *The remit of youth offending teams should be extended to those aged up to 20, in order to provide locally-led, integrated support to help keep young adult offenders out of prison, cut reoffending and prevent them from entering a life of crime.*

### Pointers to best practice from the research literature on youth services & services for youths

The 2011 Education Select Committee report highlighted the fact there is limited evidence available based on external evaluations of youth services by academics and research organisations on the impact of the impact of services. While there are considerable local ad hoc surveys and reviews they rarely compare one type of service with another in the same location or similar services in different locations. This is likely to remain the case for a number of reasons which have become more prevalent in the last five years:

- With new models of commissioning and the increased role of charities and private providers there are a very wide range of models making like on like comparisons difficult
- The multiple models and associated gatekeepers means researchers struggle to secure access to a sufficiently large number of cases on which to make meaningful judgments
- Reductions in funding available for pilot assessments has reduced since 2009 meaning that there is difficulty in leveraging in more substantial research funding from national or EU wide agencies
- Charities' funding tends to be focused on particular challenges or constituencies which have relationships to multiple agencies and settings.
- There are limited publication channels for locally-based client facing action research and a perception of limited interest from outside the immediate, often geographically restricted stakeholder group.

The complexity of analysing research in this area in part relates to the wide range of metrics used to assess outcomes. These are multiple and each is different in character. To the extent that the aim of youth services is to enable young people to function effectively in the adult world, the ever changing complexity of that world correspondingly implies an evolving set of skills. For example in the last ten years alone skills relating to social media, enterprise, online





financial transactions and privacy would not have been seen as areas where young people would need to be skilled. There is correspondingly little research in these key areas.

Even where access to services has been possible the evaluation of youth services has not been systematic, and largely qualitative rather than quantitative. Where quantitative data has been secured the statistical analyses has tended to be less sophisticated than in other areas of the social sciences making it difficult to draw out the distinctive impact of specific interventions or features. Nonetheless, inferences can be drawn where convergent evidence is found across different measures within one study or across a range of studies. Many reports are not subject to peer review and while useful to illuminate practice in certain 16 areas descriptively do not lend themselves to thorough assessment by specialists. These limitations are not unusual in practice-based settings, but set limitations on what can and cannot be inferred from individual studies.

A range of studies have sought to assess the impact of youth services and the features of such services which have a demonstrable and measureable impact. The following reports are arguably the most significant in the context of the criteria of methodological robustness, appropriate sample, and policy relevance.

- Merton et al (2004) found that youth work has an identifiable impact on 'soft skills'— which would have an impact of employment, economic and health outcomes. The study found that young people valued those experiences delivered by youth services in dedicated youth service projects and facilities and believed that these experiences would help them in later life. It also found that the sustained contact with services over time was particularly valued by young people questioned.
- Feinstein et al (2007) was a rare longitudinal study, examining which young people participate in leisure time activities and what the impact of participation was on later outcomes, based on data from the mid-1980s. The research concluded that unstructured youth clubs were particularly likely to attract at risk young people but that the success of such facilities depends on the skill of the youth workers who deliver the services, in the context of managing levels of risk and support.
- Smith, Farrant, and Marchant, H.J. (1972) found that intensive face to face support sessions in a youth centre setting led to reduction in the proportion convictions, number of court appearances and number of offences compared to a control group of at risk young people who did not receive youth service intervention. There were no significant differences found on measures of social attitudes.
- Maychell, Pathak and Cato (1996) in a research project funded by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that the relationship between the youth worker and young people was central to any successful initiative irrespective of the



quality of the surroundings. However poor facilities were also seen as creating a high level of frustration and hindering effective engagement and development.

- w Williamson, H. (1997) found that younger participants in attending youth centres normally highlight the practical provision on offer such as shelter, games, music as the central reason for participation, while older young people placed greater emphasis on the accessibility of advice, support and guidance on an informal, non-judgemental and confidential basis. All of the young people drew distinctions between workers in whom they were willing to confide their feelings and concerns, and those they were not.
- w Furlong and Cartmel (1997) in a Scottish study found that young people valued the opportunity for social contact and having access to a centre where they could meet their friends and develop new ones. They also valued the opportunity to develop new skills and take part in different activities. Youth clubs organised by community education were identified by clients as particularly useful source of information on personal and social issues. Youth club participants felt well serviced on information about HIV/AIDS or drugs. While members tended to be relatively happy with their level of involvement in the club per se they felt that their involvement in the decision making process was limited. One key area where youth work in the centre setting failed was in the area of guidance and counselling. This was taken to be caused by the limited opportunities and facilities for one-to-one discussion.

Even when not explicitly set up to address the needs of the homeless, drop-in open access facilities often attract users with no fixed shelter. The effectiveness and availability of drop-in facilities for this service group is recognised as recurrent challenge (Shillington, Bousman and Clapp, 2011).

Specification of the fundamentals of drop-in centres can get overlooked in specialist assessments of new facilities or repurposing existing locations or spaces. Slesnick et al (2008) reviewed the extant literature on drop-in centres and the potential impact they can have on young homeless. They argued that there has been little empirically based guidance in relation to centre structure, for identifying a building and location conducive to facilitate activities and access for the youth.

Their key recommendations provide a very useful point of departure for the design of basic features for any youth service open access drop in facility

- w The program **philosophy** is the foundation of the drop-in centre, and all other decisions regarding the structure and programs within the centre are based on this



philosophy. While recognising that every facility and service system must find its own philosophy, Slesnick emphasises the importance of “unconditional positive regard, genuineness and empathy among program staff towards the youth.”

- W The **location** and building should be accessible to the youth. “Accessibility in this paper refers to the physical location, the surrounding community, level of safety and emotional accessibility of the drop-in for the youth”.
- W The drop-in should provide an environment that promotes the belief that youth are capable of reaching their life goals and are **capable** of doing so in a safe and supportive community. In order for this to occur,
- W It is vital that collaboration between the surrounding **community** and the drop-in centre is fostered through meetings, communication or shared activities.
- W The organization of the drop-in centre itself includes several key components which should be considered for sustaining success.
  - the drop-in will most likely appeal to the youth early on by offering to meet their most **basic needs** including food, health care, clothing, and hygiene products.
  - the establishment of **trust** is a necessary first step towards youth accepting more intensive intervention
  - the drop-in centre should have a layout including different rooms or **separate spaces**, which reduce crowding and conflict among youth.
  - A **variety of activities** should be offered to meet youths’ interests and provide structure.
  - The opportunity to work on one’s life situation or just rest should be offered **without judgment**. In other words, regardless of the youth’s choice of activity, dignity and respect for the youth must be maintained by the staff.
  - Also, a plan should be developed for how to address youths’ behaviours which create an unsafe or **counter-productive** environment.
- W Well trained and supported **staff**.
  - Due to the high levels of stress that staff may experience, it is important that they be given time to process their experiences and receive feedback. These procedures might reduce staff burn-out and turn-over.

More recently, Belur (2013) has argued on the basis of a review of education focused interventions in London that there are a number of key features which appear to be characteristics of successful youth support schemes designed to help young people who are



not in education, employment or training reduce youth crime and violence. The main emphasis of her work, echoing much of Merton's review is that the way in which activities are managed which is crucial rather than 'golden bullet activities' per se. She found that stand-alone activities or interventions are seldom effective at engaging young people in education, employment or training rather than crime and violence. By contrast the most effective interventions were found to be multi-modal, i.e. they consisted of several different elements and offered an integrated set of engagements. Additional key features identified were: v

- Provision of activity in a **safe environment** within which participants can develop of healthy, positive social relationships with peers and role models.
- Assessment of **needs of individuals** and provision of cognitive behavioural therapies to encourage change in attitudes and goal orientation.
- Provision of **tailored programmes** orientated to meeting individual needs, interests and abilities that will foster sustained engagement.
- Identification of a definite **progression path** and opportunities to move from NEET status to engaging further with ETE.

Belur (2013) also argues that a key aspect is the **referral mechanism** which will ensure that appropriate young people are directed into the correct programme. As found by Ross et al (2010) and Wikstrom & Treiber (2008), interventions targeted at individuals at risk or already manifesting problem behaviour are generally more effective than universally applied programmes. This is a key element to the eventual success of the project. For example, schools have been developing statistically based Risk of NEET Indicators (RONIs). Belur further suggests that the activities must be interesting enough to attract young people to effect initial engagement with the project. This 'hook' could be anything in principle but in practice these could be recreation (such as arts, sports, and music), or even monetary incentives (in the form of weekly allowances or travel costs). However, caution should be used in interpreting Belur's finding on this point. Extrinsic motivation through monetary award can encourage recipients to interpret their own behaviour as being attributable to just that reward with a corresponding downgrading psychologically of the other elements (eg a positive atmosphere and friendship). This work suggests that co-location of recreational, advisory and practical resources can help bridge the gap from isolation to education.

Drawing on the work of Ross et al (2010) Belur also argues for the importance of intensive engagement with qualified personnel "capable of identifying and addressing individual needs of participants is necessary to influence the requisite attitude and behaviour change". Ross et al's (2010) found that effective crime reduction programmes often incorporated therapeutic elements that supported psychological and behavioural change, increasing motivation to them to engage in training, skill or educational opportunities. Wikstrom & Treiber's (2008) found that the more successful interventions with offender behaviour featured mentoring or counselling or one-to-one sessions between young people and practitioners who are qualified, professional, and capable of developing mutual trust and



respect with young people. Again this research emphasises the potential benefits of colocation of services.

Finally, Belur argues that a key feature of successful projects is the effective facilitation of transfer of young people from the educational facility to dedicated training and educational providers. This is particularly important where recent further education reforms in relation to qualifications, funding eligibility and location of delivery have created additional navigational problems.

In this context Belur argues that the key action points for any effective intervention would be

- Targeting the right audience:
- Designing the appropriate 'hook':
- Engendering attitude change
- Smoothing the path to education, employment or training

An important issue to consider here not addressed by Belur is that each of these phases requires a **different skill set**, facilities and communication strategy. Crucially these phases are not clear-cut step by step stages, they are overlapping phases with the end of one phase blending into the beginning of the next. In that sense it can be argued that closer the resources relevant to each phase the more likely a young person will move these stages in an effective and successful manner.

One way of tackling the challenges of distributed service locations and a hard to reach audience of young people is through the medium of information technology, particularly in the context of social media developments. This is an area often referred to but rarely examined in detail.

#### How can we make progress in understanding the potential of social media?

Distributed, community-based 'drop-in' or 'open access services' for young people potentially offer an important route into social, educational and health support for those who might otherwise be overlooked by targeted, centralised services. Given that the rationale and cultural ethos of such facilities is often based on the idea of communication and customisation we can ask: **what might be the role of social media in delivering better youth services for young people?** This is an important area in its own right, but it also potentially offers an example of the way in which technology and facility management generally. Indeed ultimately the analysis here applies to the management of the entire infrastructure for service delivery. This kind of analysis highlights the general principle that securing the best benefit of infrastructure for clients requires a recognition of the very



different skill sets required at each stage of the user journey to exploit the that infrastructure for those clients. Social media provides a specific and illuminating example in that context.

In 2009 Ali and Davies highlighted key areas where young people use social media that are relevant to the development of youth services:

- keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances
- developing new contacts often with friends of friends, or people with shared interests
- sharing content, engaging in self-expression and exploring identity
- hanging out and consuming content including commercial and user-generated content — particularly music and video
- accessing information and informal learning
- participating in informal groups, and formal youth engagement opportunities.

Over the last decade young persons' use of social media has grown in volume, sophistication, impact and visibility. Over the same time line youth services have become 21 less well funded, more stretched, more complex and less visible. Consideration of how ideas about these two areas can be brought together is an easy task if we have simple models of either of them. It is a more challenging task if we recognise the complexity underlying the myths and assumptions of both of them.

Consideration of some current work around marrying contemporary ideas about social media and new ideas about youth service delivery not only offers a new way of thinking about social media and services, but about service design itself.

Modelling the most effective configuration of open access services for young people is a particularly difficult challenge for contemporary social policy analysts and researchers here in the UK and internationally. In addition to the multiple contexts, inputs and outputs for any given centre, such facilities, by their very nature, seek to support a wide range of young people with multiple, developing and often underdocumented and developing needs. One key issue is trying to model the **user journey** through such facilities and then to identify the critical points of helpful engagement by service providers.

### **How can we apply social media to an effective engagement by youth services at each of these stages and across this client life cycle?**

Successive government reports such as have acknowledged the potential role of social media in developing youth services but have not indicated in any detail as to how this might work or what the link to policy changes in the management of youth services might be. However it can be argued that successive governments have struggled with the challenges and opportunities generally of technology generally since the watershed of the Albemarle Report in the 1960s. In addition simple distinctions between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' have been rightly dismissed as too simplistic – not everyone born after 1980 is a digital expert. In the institutional setting this vacuum is being filled by local user activity.



Muirhead (2012) reported that many youth workers use social media sites like Facebook not only without the awareness of their managers but in direct contravention of local policies. He highlighted that many youth workers are anxious about the lack of clear guidelines on the use of social media in the youth services. It remains the case in 2015 that most local authorities have social media policies that serve to constrain social media usage by employees with few having a clear strategy on how social media can be supported, funded, integrated and promoted as a service resource in its own right.

And yet, as in education, healthcare and policing, the discussion of the ways in which social media can support youth service delivery and improvement appears to be stuck in a rut. There are uncertainties about the level of user expertise and motivation, whether the application of skills gained in the social sphere can be transferred to more structured institutional settings, and recurrent concerns about safeguarding, bullying and privacy. On top of this are uncertainties about the management of the link between online and offline interventions – will clients turn up for an easy-to-book online appointment? Finally there is much new research relevant to social media and young people which continues to confound some analysts' assumptions and mainstream media prejudices. If the debate on the use of 22 social media in the development of youth services is to move on we need -- as an absolute minimum -- to think about the **phases** of young people's engagement with services and how social media can be applied in different ways at different times.

To illustrate the idea of thinking through the role of social media on a stage-by-stage basis we can consider its role in relation to drop in or open access youth services (facilities which are more colloquially referred to as 'Youth Clubs'). Other aspects of youth services, and for that matter public services generally, can be analysed in this manner – each will have distinctive features; the illustration here is presented to highlight some key aspects of this approach. I call this approach '**SoMeSaS**' – 'Social Media Stage after Stage'.

First of all it is worth looking a little more closely at Belur's model. Belur (2013) has argued, on the basis her review of the effectiveness of education-focused interventions in London, that there are a number of key features which appear to be characteristics of successful youth support schemes. In focus here are schemes designed to help young people who are not in education, employment or training ('NEETS') to get training support. The main emphasis of her work, echoing much of Merton's classic review, is that it is the **way** in which activities are managed which is crucial rather than 'golden bullet activities' per se. She found that stand-alone activities or interventions are seldom effective at engaging young people in education, employment or training rather than crime and violence. By contrast the most effective interventions were found to be multi-modal, i.e. they consisted of several different elements and offered an integrated set of engagements. This in itself in principle opens up a clear role for social media but she stops short of indicating how that might work best.





Belur also argues that the activities must be interesting enough to attract young people to effect initial engagement with the project. This 'hook' could be anything in principle but in practice these could be recreation (such as arts, sports, and music), or even monetary incentives (in the form of weekly allowances or travel costs). However, caution should be used in interpreting Belur's finding on this point. Extrinsic motivation through monetary award can encourage recipients to interpret their own behaviour as being attributable to just that reward with a corresponding downgrading psychologically of the other elements (eg a positive atmosphere and friendship). Overall however his work suggests that colocation of recreational, advisory and practical resources can help bridge the gap from isolation to education.

Just how prevalent is the mobile technology which facilitates ubiquitous social media usage? On one level the use of social media amongst young people is very high and yet still growing. Ofcom (2014) found that nearly all 16-24s and 25-34s are now online (98%). However experiences and attitudes towards being online vary by age group. Younger users (16-24) deploy a range of strategies to manage their online experience proactively, while older users appear to prefer a more moderated and regulated experience. For example, with regard to protecting their identity and personal information online, younger users take a more proactive approach to managing their social media presence. Compared to all users, they are more likely to have adopted settings on Facebook that are more private (76% vs. 65% 23 for all users). Younger social networking site users are also more likely to block friends (49% vs. 36%) and delete photos that they have already posted (32% vs. 22%). These data imply that young people, over the age of 16 at least, are alert to online risks and take measures proactively to protect themselves.

Younger people are also more aware of how to protect their identity, and, interestingly, are more likely to give out inaccurate information online to protect their personal identity (34% vs. 26% for all internet users). However, they are also more likely to provide personal information online to companies as long – providing they get what they want in return (55% versus 42% for all internet users). In terms of mobile technology 90% of young people have access to a smartphone, up from 85% in 2012. This is an important aspect for online activity for young people in the context of accessing information about youth services as smartphone mobility gives the user more control over when and where information is accessed, and therefore offers greater privacy. But penetration in the market is only one aspect of the digital culture amongst young people. According to Deloitte's (2014) 'Media Consumer Survey - The Digital Divide', in general, young people are diversifying their social network accounts, rather than consolidating them. The average 16-24 year old has three social media accounts, compared to 2.5 amongst 25-34 year olds and 1.7 for the average UK respondent. Beavis (2013) has highlighted how such high usage figures do not necessarily imply that young people are sophisticated users, emphasising the wide range of levels of engagement.





Looking specifically at different types of information indicates again that young people are discriminating when it comes to assessing the credibility and appropriateness of different channels for different forms of relevant content online. For example, Lim et al (2014) found that while young people are keen to receive sexual health information online through web pages via desktop devices, fewer were comfortable with such information being presented through social media channels. In a study of 620 young adults aged 16 to 29 the found that while the majority (85%), indicated being 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' accessing sexual health information from websites, 81% felt comfortable receiving information from a doctor, with 73% comfortable at school. Overall, 67% were comfortable receiving sexual health information via mainstream media while fewer reported being comfortable getting information from social media specifically Facebook (52%), apps (51%), SMS (44%), and Twitter (36%). Presumably in practice more trusted sources within each category would lead to higher levels of comfort. Certainly the DeLoitte (2014) study suggests that the digital trust gap is narrowing with under-35s most likely to trust what they read in any media whereas the over-65's who were the most sceptical.

While not focusing directly on open access services, Hynan et al (2014) have pointed out that where used appropriately, online communication and social media can be effective in supporting and communicating with young people who might otherwise be excluded from the provision of mainstream services and facilities. They found that social media including apps helped promote a higher level of inclusion for users of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). They specifically found that participants wanted to use the internet 24 and online social media potentially offered opportunities for self-determination and selfrepresentation whilst enriching friendships. It would seem that one of the ways in which individuals who might otherwise be excluded from elective services might be through social media.

What then might be the key principles for using social media in the context of each of the four stages of Belur's model of Targeting the right audience: Designing the appropriate 'hook': Engendering attitude change; Smoothing the path to education, employment or training?

An important issue to consider here not addressed by Belur is that each of these phases requires a different skill set, facilities and communication strategy. Crucially these phases are not clear-cut step by step stages, they are overlapping phases with the end of one phase blending into the beginning of the next. In that sense it can be argued that closer the resources relevant to each phase the more likely a young person will move these stages in an effective and successful manner. To illustrate the stage by stage approach Table 1 highlights for each Belur stage a possible effective **intervention** through social media, a potential **risk** which might prevent that intervention from being effective and then potential **risk management strategies** outlining how such risks can be controlled.

**Table 4: Social Media interventions and associated risks by Belur category.**

<b>Belur Stage</b>	<b>Illustrative uses of Social media</b>	<b>Illustrative Risks</b>	<b>Illustrative Risk Management Strategies</b>
Targeting the right audience:	Use of FB, twitter and other profiles to identify potential clients in the geographical area who have expressed an interest in education	The social media activity gets lost in the torrent of feeds and pages in potential clients' digital landscape	Multiple, convergent cross platform accounts all pointing at one single digital point of contact.  Real world promotion
Designing the appropriate 'hook':	Use of social media to advertise events occurring in the open access centre, specifically targeted at potentially local users (eg music, sport, food). Make effective use of 'who else is going?' features	High awareness, low commitment	'Frictionless' access – no registration, ticketing, or confirmation bureaucracy.
Engendering attitude change	Extensive client-led initiatives on exploring and promoting individual and community led initiatives relevant to skills, education, and empowerment.	Drift and client turnovers	Client mentoring scheme supported by youth service workers.
Smoothing the path to education, employment or training	Targeted Facebook pages and twitter accounts managed by education providers but populated by learners already at the next stage to provide real time updates on open days, induction, assessment support, taster days, mentoring schemes and related activities.	Corporate overload and applicant suffocation by institutional brand. Lack of connection between social media activity and 'Ground floor Reception Desk' activity.	Do not focus on 'working closely' with first stage receivers at educational establishment. Use social media to *make* the first stage receivers the final line of 'Engendering attitude change' social media.

This list is purely illustrative but helps open the discussion around a more sophisticated mapping of the power of social media to the lifecycle of young persons' uses of services, in this case as an illustration, of drop in facilities. It is worth highlighting a few general principles which cut across individual stages:



- At all stages the activities should be **client-led**, but supported by trained and experienced youth service workers;
- At each stage the activity should **link back** to the previous stage in terms of continuity of client engagement and drawing explicitly on the experiences of users at that stage.
- At each stage the activity should already **anticipate** the next stage. For example getting engaged in a hook activity should in part give the client part of the necessary resource and understanding appropriate to the following stage – a drop in activity should anticipate and present a positive atmosphere around changing attitudes to education attainment.
- There should be no assumptions about the **rate** at which individuals might go through each phase and social media engagements should reflect that.
- The client herself or himself must have a sense of **continuity and progress** and the option, but never the requirement to share that sense of development with others. Social media blogs can provide the vehicle by which this can be put into effect. A particular aspect of this is that social media can highlight how progress and development is not always straightforward and not without its setbacks.
- Youth service specialists and peer group members should be encouraged to recognise the ways in which social media can play an important and distinctive role in **maintaining contact** with clients who drift or who for practical reasons cannot attend real world events. Social media should be the ultimate 'open door policy'.

It is an often-heard mantra of policy developers, service managers, and media pundits that 'appropriate' use of social media can help the delivery of our public services. But in that context we should not restrict our thinking to safeguarding, anti-bullying and privacy – as extremely important as they are. If we do we will miss the importance of tailoring social media deployment to clearly thought-through models of how youth services can deliver the right support stage-by-stage, to the right clients, at the right time and with right people.



## The importance of involving young people in decision making

Involving young people in the design and commissioning of research into what affects them can be effective. Research by Fleming (2010) has demonstrated how this can be done. The approach has been to ensure that youth work would be:

*"embedded within communities, increasing their ownership of the local youth offer. The expected result of this is that there is far greater opportunity to co-produce youth work outcomes with young people and the community, recognising the community as an asset, thus leveraging latent community resources. Co-production increases ownership and participation, which in turn leads to increased quality outcomes. As a locally embedded organisation, it is hoped that there will be a greater knowledge of needs and issues locally. This would ensure that the offer to young people is most appropriate and therefore, most effective leading to greater value for money and improved outcomes."*

The key features of this form of Social Action Research include the following key elements:

- Participatory – facilitates the full involvement of research subjects and other stakeholders in all stages of the research.
- Inductive – draws theory out of data rather than interprets data and organises data within predefined or given frameworks.
- Critical – grounded on a power perspective, committed to social change to the advantage of those currently without power.
- Anti-oppressive – actively challenges assumptions which underpin unequal social relations, with an explicit commitment to empowerment and social justice.
- Iterative – builds up theory and knowledge progressively.
- Cyclical – a process that continually revisits and evaluates its building blocks

Checkoway (2011) reviewed how youth participation in the design of their own support not only helps improve the quality of that support for individual users and improve the quality of services generally, but that it strengthens personal and social development of the clients. He found that youth participation can and typically does contribute to positive social development, better service decisions, and, he argues, ultimately to a more democratic society, particularly in the context of young people who have limited or no engagement in, and therefore limited if any influence over, other aspects of their lives.

Recently Sanders and Munford (2014) have developed a model based on maximising the effectiveness of Youth-centred practice focusing on what they call 'positive youth development' (PYD) aimed at improving practices and pathways to better outcomes for vulnerable youth. They argue that PYD practices have a positive effect on outcomes and resilience for vulnerable youth and that PYD is not related to risk reduction over time by



vulnerable youth. A strong feature of their research is that Consistency in service provision across agencies improves outcomes.

They carried out a longitudinal study of 1012 youth (aged 13–17 years). Half were clients of two or more services and were followed for three years to enable analysis of the impact over time of services delivered using positive youth development practices (PYD). Results indicated that service quality had a positive effect on wellbeing and resilience 5 years later, but not on risk levels. They argue for the importance of consistent use of PYD approaches across services, and the need for services to more directly address risk levels for vulnerable youth.

An increasing feature of very recent research on services for youth is a focus by some projects on how the exponential growth in mobile technology and associated social media and other communication systems have impacted on the life of young people and their relationship to services engagement and effectiveness. May-Chahal et al (2012) argued that current concern around child protection remains largely with offline harm and abuse, and is separated from the focus on child protection in relation to risks online. They analysed children's methods for assessing who they are talking to online and found that young people use similar methods to detect identity online as they do offline.

Sen (2015) analyzed the use of social media and the internet of young people who had been in care settings or extended period and compared their online behaviour with those who had not been in care. They found that cared for children reported use of digital media was not substantially different to that of their peer group "their core virtual networks had 28 significant overlap with their core offline networks and social contact via digital media could provide welcome, if limited and individualized, social support." Similarly to May-Chahal et al (2012) Sen found "underlying issues within their social relationships reflected greater similarity with a pre-digital age than has sometimes been suggested."

This area of research is still in its infancy. However, these studies do suggest that the role of social media and online behaviour has not been given the attention it deserves in the context of the provision of services for young people, particularly for those who are NEET. Pulling the insights of May-Chahal et al (2012) and Sen (2015) together with the work of Belur (2013) suggests the possibility that social media might an important 'hook' to facilitate engagement of young people with broader recreational and educational opportunities.



## Contemporary models of integrating distributed services

Increasingly service providers and applied researchers are considering the different ways in which the challenges of balancing accessible location specific services on the one hand with the need for connected services on the other. One difficulty here is that services aimed at resourceful and mainstream young people can fail to separate out the effectiveness of the service model from the informed and do not need to demonstrate a high level of resilience to user demands.

In this context consideration of the design features of services for young people with complex needs can provide a better test of the robustness of service design. Garland, Hough, Landsverk and Brown (2001) in a survey of over 22,000 children and adolescents who were receiving at least one of mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, special education, and alcohol and drug services. They found a range of factors that impacted on the overall quality of support young people received. For example, they found that young people often received different mental health care depending on the specific provider with service provision reflecting the mission of the organisation rather than the child's actual needs.

Ungar, Liebenberg and Ikeda (2014) reviewed a range of services supporting interventions of young people across multiple welfare, criminal justice, mental health and educational facilities. They found that young people with complex needs (YPCNs) use multiple services that are often poorly coordinated. Drawing on data from 116 users multiple service users, they identified six principles for the design of services which highlighted effective practice in their research and in previous detailed analysis. In brief they highlighted that services were most likely to meet the long-term needs of youth facing the cumulative disadvantages of family, community, school and individual challenges were they demonstrated the following principles:

• **Multi-level.**

- Services operating at all levels of need eg in support of different levels of educational ladder with no single intervention relied upon

• **Coordinated**

- Staff dedicated to linking users to services and services to each other.

• **Continuity**

- Services need to provide joined up support particularly in sharing client details and managing timelines. The greatest threat to systems failure was seen as the link between initial screening or identification of support needs and service delivery.

• **Negotiated**

- Service focus and delivery is more effective if negotiated with users. This requires a standardised set of protocols to ensure implementation, deliver



consistency and aid young people's capacity to negotiate support that is meaningful to them.

📌 **Provided along a continuum**

- There is a need to ensure a wide range of potential interventions rather than a small number which might not meet all needs.

📌 **Evidence based**

- Specific interventions in terms of face to face counselling and support need to be offered on the basis of clear empirical evidence that they are effective in the specified setting.

Ungar et al (2014) emphasise the need for service designers to be comfortable with **complexity**. They argue that simple service arrangements might be easier to manage but run the risk of not providing the most effective range, scheduling or customisation of support for users. They argue that community and youth professionals have clear role to play in mapping the opportunities provided by well-differentiated, focused, empirically-based 'complex' services to the multiple, evolving and individual needs of young people.

As highlighted by Merton et al (2004) and reinforced by Ungar et al (2014) a key feature of service delivery is **face to face communication** between young people and service professionals. Ruch (2013) has recently examined this issue in detail. She argues that research and reports in the UK have consistently highlighted young people place a high premium on service professionals to demonstrate honesty, reliability and continuity in their dealings with them. Her review of the literature indicates however that despite this awareness, professionals continue to struggle to demonstrate that they do in fact deliver this. Focusing primarily of social workers she argues that this is a "complex, partial and fragmented aspect of practice", which "lacks research that directly explores how social workers communicate with children". She found that practitioners' commitment to childcentred practice was constrained by contextual factors relating to the physical, relational and emotional dimensions of practice. Ruch emphasises in particular how discussions with young people especially younger children are characterised by non-linear and organic conversational flows contrast heavily with the bureaucratic nature of much of professionals' other institutional communications. Ruch argues that communication awareness needs to be a stronger part of the training programmes for professionals working with young people. Ruch (2013) provides clear evidence that even basic skills such as face to communication, 30 essential to the delivery of services cannot be taken for granted and need to be incorporated into training strategies.



## Summary of key features of effective drop-in youth service facilities

It is clear that while there are differences in emphasis between US and UK studies, and the language, preoccupations and assumptions of older (for present purposes pre-2009) research. There are also differences in terms of the provision of support for specialist/complex clients and client situations compared to 'mainstream' clients and broadly generic services. However, a number of key principles for drop in services remain:

- Knowing the client constituency beyond understanding any specific clients
- Involving the user constituency and actual users in the design and delivery of services and in the research and evaluation of services
- Open access and reason for initial access ('hook')
- well-defined pathways to achievement
- differentiated and even potentially 'complex' service and support options
- staff who can act as brokers and navigators v interpersonal skills of staff
- qualified staff
- training for staff
- provision for one to one support and staff trained in specific validated techniques and approaches
- clear support and policies on IT and social media as a central part of support and recognised as a central part of the lived experience of users
- positive emotional and cultural atmosphere of the drop-in
- basic facilities which work reliably for users
- community liaison

In addition in much of the above there is considerable direct and indirect evidence of the stakeholder engagement including but not limited to:

- Maintaining engagement with successful users for continued support and for mentoring and support contributions.
- Raising awareness amongst senior service managers, community leaders, politicians, media and educational providers of the lived reality of the work of the centre(s).
- Sharing best practice with networks of providers nationally and internationally

## Conclusions

If Open Access Youth Work is to play an important role in improving outcomes for the next generation of young people it must be approached as part of a broader, holistic approach. Specifically there is a need for a clear focus on action in relation to the **contexts** in which such services operate, the service **network** design, the **centre** design and **stakeholder** engagement. On the basis of the analysis in this report there are a set of actions for any





serious development in this area which seeks to develop effective, credible and sustainable open access facilities.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- There is a **clear need** for effective services for young people on social, financial and human rights grounds
- The challenges facing the successful delivery of such services are in some respects **the most difficult for a generation.**
- There have been **significant cuts** in services in England and Wales since 2010
- Not all services have been cut in the same way. There has been a shift in funding away from non-statutory to **statutory** and from generic **to targeted** services.
- At the level of specific services such data as we have indicates a **reduction** in support for activities for youths and for youth work, but an increase in support for youth engagement. There is considerable **variation** across local authorities. This highlights the importance of recognising how service management is being **refracted** through local needs, contexts and policy priorities.
- For youth services to be effective there are **clear guidelines** which can be derived from 30 years of structured research and other assessments which give a broad framework and sets of principles which when applied can maximise the likelihood of success for young people, communities and the services themselves including staff.
- Many reports and reviews of youth services are **methodologically poor**. They are not well founded in robust data collection, management and analyses and lack controls against which the specified service or intervention can be compared. There is a real need and opportunity for process and outcomes based research to assess **what works and why.**
- There are however some well-designed studies in **the peer-reviewed literature** which address key issues relevant to good service network and service facility design but these are limited in number.

## SERVICE NETWORK DESIGN

- It is essential that specific service locations, whether specialist, generic, targeted or open has a clearly defined function within the broader 'service network'.
- Where possible service networks should be multilevel, co-ordinated, continuous, negotiated with users, provided along a continuum and evidence based.
- Voluntary sector providers have developed a new discourse around support drawing on the concepts of transformation, prevention, devolution, collaboration and cooperation which, in principle provides a foundation for co-delivery of services for youth. There remain issues around the balance of contribution and the relation of



voluntary sector to direct funding from that state and funding through the provision of services in collaboration with public sector agencies.

## **DROP-IN SERVICE FACILITY DESIGN**

- Knowing the client constituency beyond understanding any specific clients
- Involving the user constituency and actual users in the design and delivery of services and in the research and evaluation of services
- Open access and reason for initial access ('hook')
- well-defined pathways to achievement
- differentiated and even potentially 'complex' service and support options
- staff who can act as brokers and navigators
- interpersonal skills of staff
- qualified staff
- training for staff
- provision for one to one support and staff trained in specific validated techniques and approaches
- clear support and policies on IT and social media as a central part of support and recognised as a central part of the lived experience of users
- positive emotional and cultural atmosphere of the drop-in v basic facilities which work reliably for users
- community liaison

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DESIGN**

- It is essential to maintaining engagement with successful users for continued support and for mentoring and support contributions.
- Raising awareness amongst senior service managers, community leaders, politicians, media and educational providers of the lived reality of the work of the centre(s).
- Sharing best practice with networks of providers nationally and internationally
- For youth services to be effective there are clear guidelines which can be derived from 30 years of structured research and other assessment which give a broad framework and sets of principles which when applied can maximise the likelihood of success for young people, communities and the services themselves including staff.
- Knowing the client constituency beyond understanding any specific clients
- Involving the user constituency and actual users in the design and delivery of services and in the research and evaluation of services
- Open access and reason for initial access ('hook')
- well-defined pathways to achievement
- differentiated and even potentially 'complex' service and support options
- staff who can act as brokers and navigators
- interpersonal skills of staff



- qualified staff
- training for staff
- provision for one to one support and staff trained in specific validated techniques and approaches
- clear support and policies on IT and social media as a central part of support and recognised as a central part of the lived experience of users
- positive emotional and cultural atmosphere of the drop-in v basic facilities which work reliably for users
- community liaison

Support for young people is arguably needed now more than at any time in the last 50 years. It is clear that if properly designed, managed, staffed and resourced, drop-in facilities can make a very significant contribution to that need.

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