

All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs Youth Work Inquiry

27 June 2018

London Youth
47-49 Pitfield Street
London N1 6DA

About this consultation

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs has established a [Youth Work Inquiry](#) and is calling for evidence on the current state of youth work in England by 27 June 2018.

About this response

This response is on behalf of London Youth and supported by [Young Barnet Foundation](#), [Young Brent Foundation](#), [Young Camden Foundation](#), [Young Ealing Foundation](#), [Young Hammersmith and Fulham Foundation](#), [Young Harrow Foundation](#), and [Young Westminster Foundation](#).



About London Youth

[London Youth](#) is a federation of over 320 community youth organisations in London. We are a youth charity on a mission to improve the lives of young people in London, challenging them to become the best they can. Young people need opportunities outside school to have fun with their friends, to learn new skills, to make a positive change in their communities and to shape the city they live in.

We deliver a broad range of meaningful benefits to our members, including funded opportunities, training and professional development, specialist networks, Quality Mark accreditation, and a policy and research voice. With members and partners, we deliver sports, arts, and youth social action programmes, as well as the [Talent Match London](#) employability programme to young people in London.

We also run two residential centres, [Hindleap Warren](#) in Sussex and [Woodrow High House](#) in Buckinghamshire, that help young people develop their skills and confidence through specialist outdoor education.

We directly develop the confidence, resilience and relationship skills of over 27,000 children and young people each year on our programmes and reach tens of thousands more through our membership network.

About Young People's Foundations (YPFs)

The Young People's Foundation (YPF) model was developed by John Lyon's Charity to combat the effects of widespread cuts in funding on the children and young people's sector, particularly in Outer London.

YPFs are place-based charities who lead the children and young people sector in their respective boroughs. They support and grow opportunities for young people through a network of local member organisations. They encourage networks, leverage funds and locate spaces for our members to deliver services. Their members identify needs for capacity building support. They work with London Youth and a range of partners across different sectors to affect positive change for young people in their boroughs.

The goal of the YPFs is to ensure that the organisations and groups that serve children and young people are strong, sustainable, and fit for purpose. They work strategically to bring different groups together to develop partnership projects and share resources and good practice. They concentrate on four main strands of work:

- Facilitating centralised fundraising based on a consortia or partnership approach in order to access funding from a variety of sources;
- Providing a 'venue bank' for groups to share and access available sites to run their projects;
- Distributing a small grant fund to member organisations; and
- Organising sector specific capacity building to support overarching sector development.

Our response

What is the role of youth work in addressing the needs and opportunities for young people?

We consider that high-quality youth work plays a vital role in addressing young people's needs and providing them with positive opportunities. At London Youth, our vision is that all young Londoners should grow up healthy, able to express themselves, navigate a fulfilling career, and make a positive contribution in their communities. Our mission is to support and challenge young people to become the best they can be; developing their confidence, resilience and relationship skills.

The role of youth work is highly dependent on local factors. However, we believe that all high-quality youth provision shares these characteristics:

- Services are needed, wanted by, and are effective in delivering positive outcomes for young people within their local community;
- Essential policies and procedures are in place to keep young people safe, premises and resources are fit for purpose, and the organisation meets its legal requirements as set out by the Charity Commission;
- There is meaningful involvement of young people in decision-making at a range of levels within the organisations with young people co-producing projects and influencing decisions at a more strategic level; and

- There is a commitment to continuous improvement and partnership working, including making referrals and signposting young people to other agencies and organisations.

We strongly believe in the role of youth work to support young people with their needs and challenge them with new opportunities. Youth organisations allow young people the chance to meet and mix with new people, including those from different backgrounds, in a neutral and trusted environment. They provide a number of benefits to young people, such as skills, confidence, open-mindedness, and a sense of belonging and connection to the local community. While targeted programmes, aimed at addressing youth violence, employability, or mental wellbeing, have a huge and positive impact addressing specific needs, the context of universal provision youth work provides a huge range of benefits beyond these targeted outcomes. While young people are the main beneficiaries, there are positive externalities for their families, friends, and wider communities. This is most apparent in the role that youth organisations play in signposting and connecting their communities to services and local resources. In areas of London with the highest deprivation, youth organisations are vital assets to their communities.

A member of Dare London, London Youth's youth advisory board, recently described the power of youth groups in a speech: "For me, youth groups are important for the development of young people. They provide life skills, character development, opportunities, social interaction, support, encouragement and much, much more... You're a team the minute you're in a youth group. It lays foundations as to how you grow; you learn from one another. I was able to learn off my friends and my youth leaders and mentors. These mentors were able to give me the courage and strength I needed to step out of my box and I was inspired, and still am, by their kindness and captivating words."

Are the key issues and challenges faced by young people being addressed by current youth service provisions?

We do not believe that the current youth service provision is adequately resourced to address the challenges facing young people in London.

Young people across the country face key challenges to successful transitions to adulthood, and several of these are particularly pronounced for young people living in London. Trust for London's [London's Poverty Profile 2017](#) indicates that 27% of Londoners live in poverty, compared to 21% across England. Seven out of ten households in England in temporary accommodation are in London and 80% of these include children. According to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's [English Indices of Deprivation 2015](#), some of the most strongly concentrated pockets of deprivation are in inner London. Serious violence, including violence among and against young people, is tragically high in London and is one of the largest concerns for young people, according to London Youth's polling. There is a looming crisis in mental health, with teen suicide rates in London reported to be four times the national average. We consistently hear from members and young Londoners that there is a lack of positive opportunities, whether it is good employment or accessible youth services. In our recent [Hidden in Plain Sight](#) report, we identified that nationally there may be as many as 480,000 'hidden' young people who are not in education, employment, or training and are not accessing statutory welfare support.

Against this backdrop of challenges, youth work provision in London has gone through a fundamental restructuring over the last decade, largely due to funding cuts and the effects of austerity. In March 2017, we published a report on the changing needs of young Londoners, [Young People's Capital of the World?](#). The changes discussed in this report, which are discussed at greater length below, can be summarised:

- A trend towards targeted interventions over preventative, universal provision youth work;
- The changing role of local authorities in delivering, funding, and commissioning youth services;
- The increasing burden on voluntary organisations in the youth sector; and
- Changes to funding sources, leading to smaller and shorter-term funds being available.

As a trend, funding has become increasingly focused on targeted programmes that give support to specific groups with defined needs, or on new projects that are less likely to include universal and open access provision. The balance between prevention and intervention has tipped towards intervention, as increasingly constrained resources have been diverted towards the most obvious need. This has had the effect of a lack of early help for young people whose needs may not be immediately obvious or who may not meet intervention criteria. The benefits of early action are well documented: saving money in the longer-term and promoting wellbeing of individuals and communities. It has also mean fewer opportunities for young people, particularly from less wealthy backgrounds, to engage in positive activities with their peers.

The shift towards more targeted, project-specific funding has also had an impact on the continuity of provision for young people. Youth workers have told us that it has led to more rapid turnover of projects as funding is typically shorter-term. It is now more difficult to sustain projects that young people may already be engaged in. The focus on targeted work also appears to have coloured young people's views on youth centres in their local area. Young people felt that 'good kids' were marginalised and that youth clubs 'attracted the wrong crowd'.

In the absence of local authority commissioning, community youth organisations have found it increasingly difficult to find reliable funding and the voluntary youth sector has had to substantially diversify its sources of funding. Youth organisations have approached this challenge with determination and have explored a range of options for funding and service delivery, so that they can continue to make as much difference as possible to the young people they work with. Organisations are now looking at other ways of generating income, for example letting venues to other organisations or providing advice on a consultancy basis.

Typical funding sources include grants from charitable trusts, foundations, and large businesses with well-established and funded corporate responsibility programmes. While independent trusts and foundations are not able to replace the amount of funding being cut from the public sector, they are increasingly seeking to understand how their investment complements existing provision, and aligning their work with other funders and investors in a given area. Developing links with local businesses is seen as time-consuming and often dependent on personal links or location, with organisations in outer London boroughs further removed from large business bases.

Over the past 10 years, the voluntary sector has begun to adapt. As statutory sources of funding have disappeared, new models, innovation and a much more active voluntary sector funding community have supported provision for young people. London Youth's network of community youth organisations across the capital continues to provide services and to respond to need. New

partnerships, such as the Young People's Foundations (YPFs), have emerged in response to the changing environment facing the youth sector. Local authorities are now playing a different role in many areas, shifting to a supporting rather than commissioning role or by reconstituting their youth services as independent charities or social enterprises.

Many of the largest challenges that young people in London face are beyond the power of youth service provision to solve alone. These large-scale forces are constant challenges to young Londoners, all other Londoners, and the rest of society: the cost of living, and particularly housing; low-paid and insecure work; and public services and austerity. Youth work provision helps to reduce the impact of these forces, but is also made less effective by the same forces.

Despite these challenges, youth work professionals continue to make a difference to local young people. Many of these professionals have years of experience, are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, and have an in-depth knowledge of the issues affecting young people in their areas. We have heard that a common sentiment is that youth workers are worried about their ability to deliver on what young people were asking for in light of reduced budgets.

Are there sufficient youth workers to support youth services and other delivery models for good quality youth work?

We cannot provide figures on the changes to capacity in London's youth sector. However, our members are explicit that the current situation in London is grave and that the sector is contracting.

Our clearest evidence comes from a series of reports published by Sian Berry AM and based on FOI data requested from the London borough councils about their youth provision. The latest report, [London's Lost Youth Services 2018](#), showed the following changes to local authority youth services in London boroughs since 2011/12:

- The combined budget for council youth services in 30 London boroughs is £39 million lower than it was in 2011/2012;
- The average council youth service budget has been cut by 44% or £1.5 million; and
- There are 800 fewer full-time youth workers employed by London councils.

While the above figures are worrying, they only apply to local authority youth provision. The actual situation is likely much worse, as there has been no corresponding increase in funding to the voluntary youth sector during the same period. We are aware that a number of voluntary youth organisations have limited their opening times, reduced the amount of open access sessions available, or have closed down entirely.

What are the training and workforce development needs to secure and sustain youth work?

We consider that our 320 member youth organisations in London have a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and professionalism. London Youth takes an active role in supporting training and professional development for youth workers in London. We offer training in: safeguarding, health and safety, building management, equality and diversity, impact measurement and evaluation, mental health, risk assessment, and leadership, as well as accredited lead safeguarding officer and mental health first aid courses.

However, we consider that the rapidly changing nature of youth work provision in London has left gaps in the training and workforce development offer. As a number of statutory and other services have been reduced in the past decade, we are aware that youth workers in London are increasingly operating as frontline practitioners for a number of professions outside of their own and that they are not necessarily trained to deal with.

The most pressing of these issues is in mental health support, where youth workers are often placed in the unenviable position of recognising mental ill health among the young people they work with, providing signposting to statutory or other services, and then continuing to provide support to young people when those services prove to be oversubscribed and underfunded. We commonly hear that young people are diagnosing themselves with mental ill health but not seeking treatment because they assume that they will not be able to access mental health support through statutory services. Increasingly, youth workers fill this frontline mental health support role, but are largely not trained to do so and operate without communication with or support from health authorities. London Youth has been periodically offering mental health first aid courses and these are massively over-subscribed almost as soon as they are opened. The demand for more of these opportunities remains high from our members and other parts of the youth sector.

We are concerned about the decline in validated youth work qualifications that are being offered. This is a particularly acute issue for Level 1 qualifications, with a preponderance of the courses on offer aimed at experienced youth work professionals and those seeking to specialise. The decline of entry-level qualifications is a threat to the long-term sustainability of the youth sector.

We know that youth work is a popular career choice for young people. On Talent Match London, our Big Lottery-funded employability programme, working in 'education and youth work' was the fourth highest choice. We are deeply concerned that youth work is increasingly not seen as a viable career and has suffered from sustained devaluing. The youth sector needs investment and greater confidence about its future so that we can attract, train and retain the dedicated and professional youth workers of the future.

We have heard from our member youth organisations, particularly those from smaller organisations, that there are skills gaps among their staff. The key areas are in business development, such as marketing, finance, HR, fundraising, strategy, and digital development.

This is a particularly acute issue in the area of fundraising because of the changes to funding over the last decade. With the decline in central and local government funding and commissioning, community youth organisations have found it increasingly difficult to find reliable funding and have

had to devote more time and resources to finding and accessing sources of funding. Many smaller community youth organisations struggle to dedicate the necessary time and resources to fundraising and with the youth sector as a whole reducing in size, many organisations no longer have a member of staff specifically designated for fundraising, meaning that practitioners often feel ill-equipped for the role.

Get in touch



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