



Perth & Kinross Universal Youth Work Partnership

Impact Evaluation: Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This report presents details of a rapid appraisal of the impact of the Perth & Kinross Universal Youth Work Partnership (PKUYWP), conducted between March and May 2023. The findings are based on a review of relevant materials and interviews with staff, volunteers and young people involved with activities supported by the Partnership. The enquiry sought to determine the extent to which the funding and organisational arrangements have contributed towards the attainment of the Partnership's objectives. The report draws together findings from the discussions with participants, to reach conclusions about the Partnership's impact, and generates recommendations to help shape practice going forward.

The report concludes that the work supported by the Partnership has made a significant impact on the young people, whose engagement in constructive activities and in purposive relationships with trusted adults has been made possible only through the considered allocation of the Partnership's funds. The key findings to emerge from the enquiry are summarised below.

Partnership Advantages

The relationships between agencies have changed through their participation in PKUYWP, with the prevailing culture changing from competition to collaboration, support and encouragement, underpinned by a *can do* attitude. Membership of PKUYWP has provided all agencies with stability, enabling them to focus on delivering quality provision rather than on organisational survival. This has resulted in the generation of a "critical mass" of universal youth work throughout Perth & Kinross.

Being part of the collective has enhanced the credibility of all agencies, which have benefitted from external recognition of the impact of PKUYWP overall. Agencies have derived support and learnt from one another, building capacity and quality throughout the area, and ensuring all provision benefits from specialisms within the Partnership.

Positive Impact

PKUYWP-funded provision has made considerable impact on the lives of young people throughout Perth & Kinross, in ways that would not have been possible without the universal offer, particularly for those experiencing the most extreme challenges and for those living in the most remote communities. Participation in these activities has provided somewhere for young people to 'escape', to enjoy themselves and to develop new skills. Young people and practitioners identified a range of areas they feel have been positively impacted by the universal provision supported by PKUYWP, including: opportunities for socialising and the development of social skills; enhanced confidence, self-esteem and connection to one another and their community; communication skills; a strengthened sense of identity and resilience; and achievement of accredited awards. Underpinning all these impacts is a sense that their engagement in the universal offer has developed a

commitment on the part of participating young people to making a positive contribution to their communities; and empowerment to act on that commitment.

The scale of the impact cannot be over-stated, with participation rates in PKUYWP-sponsored activities doubling over the first three years of operation. These increases have been achieved with the same level of funding, and demonstrate how success has built on success, with many young people attending on the strength of word-of-mouth promotion. Likewise, the ability of the universal offer to engage young people in *diversions* activities – thereby reducing their involvement in anti-social or criminal behaviours – means that the PKUYWP funds have most likely contributed to reduced *downstream* costs.

Nurturing Relationships

The universal offer provides young people with continuity and consistency in their relationships with Youth Workers. This allows practitioners to get alongside, support and encourage the young person on an ongoing basis through a person-centred approach to this relational practice, infused with empathy and unconditional positive regard and an evident commitment to young people's progression and empowerment. The relationships young people develop with these trusted adults helps make them feel comfortable in sharing their aspirations with Youth Workers, and ensures negotiations about their engagement and trajectory are based on their unique starting points.

Practitioners demonstrate a variety of skills and traits that young people value, including: being welcoming from the first encounter; listening to young people and taking them seriously; demonstrating that they care for the young people; being available and consistent; accepting young people for who they are, and not judging them; and being able to provide a different perspective when talking through young people's problems.

Dedicated & Safe Spaces

Partner agencies have secured access to dedicated spaces for young people, where they feel safe and are able to *be themselves*, away from the rules and pressure of other people's expectations and in the company of supportive peers and practitioners. For many, the youth work settings have become second homes, somewhere to *decompress* and feel empowered to access support whenever they want, something of particular value to those experiencing poor mental health or grappling with issues around their identity. The sense of freedom fostered by access to these safe spaces – both to be oneself and to act on one's own preferences – has been liberating for many young people.

The high-profile locations of these spaces has enhanced accessibility to youth work provision, making young people feel valued as part of the community and contributing to their pride in and respect for the settings. Where young people have some degree of 'ownership' of the space (e.g. stamping their individual and group identities on the environment), their engagement in positive activities and developmental programmes has deepened. Additionally, access to a warm space and food has contributed to young people's wellbeing throughout the current cost of living crisis, when home for many is no longer a comfortable space.

Amplified Youth Voice

Youth voice runs through every aspect of the universal offer provided by the partner agencies. As well as running formal youth voice groups, every aspect of the operation of PKUYWP-funded activities is subject to deliberation by young people, whose contributions help to shape provision and ensure high participation rates and impact. Young people have developed a range of skills through engagement in these activities and the respect shown by practitioners for their views; this has empowered them to engage in decision-making in a variety of contexts at both local and Perth & Kinross levels.

A crucial element in strengthening their voice has been the wider developmental work undertaken at settings across Perth & Kinross. These have enhanced young people's understanding of and views on a wide range of issues (e.g. climate emergency, community action plans, health and leisure services, transport, etc.), and enhanced their self-esteem, empowering participants in the universal youth work offer to feel confident about making contributions to formal consultations.

Wider Participation

The provision of PKUYWP-funded youth work in their setting has enhanced participation in other offers, both activities run by the partner agencies utilising other funding streams and initiatives run by other organisations (including detached and holiday provision, one-to-one sessions, targeted group work and themed drop-ins). This reflects the way in which participation in universal provision has raised young people's awareness of opportunities and the benefit on engagement, while also enhancing their confidence to engage.

Having learnt to develop trusting relationships with Youth Workers through their involvement in universal provision, young people feel more confident about engaging in other activities. Furthermore, they have learnt through the universal offer that they can both benefit from this wider engagement and – through wider participation in community-based initiatives – enhance their contribution to their communities.

Uniquely Perth & Kinross

The report includes details about the continued reduction in provision of universal youth work through Scotland and the rest of the UK. The unique partnership approach adopted in Perth & Kinross has ensured the continuation of what other local authorities – faced with cuts in funding due to austerity policies – have deemed to be a *disposable* service, with no foreknowledge of the likely long-term increase in youth disengagement, disenfranchisement and anti-social behaviours. By safeguarding provision through the PKUYWP, the funding partners have safeguarded provision for our young people in a way that their peers across the country should envy and seek to learn from; and potentially saved the communities of Perth & Kinross from irreversible inter-generational breakdown.