



*“The Universe is a great place ... ‘cause [the youth work partnership] is in it ... !?!”*

## Perth & Kinross Universal Youth Work Partnership

### Impact Evaluation Final Report

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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.

## Acknowledgements

This enquiry could not have been undertaken without the contribution made by so many participants from the organisations involved in delivering the partnership's vision throughout the Perth & Kinross district. I am grateful to staff, volunteers and young people for giving their time willingly to take part in interviews and group discussions throughout the duration of the enquiry, and to staff in each of the settings for helping me to make arrangements to identify and engage people in the process.

For their trust and support, I am grateful to the key officers at the partnership agencies responsible for commissioning this evaluation: Brian Hutton (PKC) and Steven Greig (GT). Brian and Steven provided me with access to resources and contacts when asked, and afforded me sufficient distance to ensure the evaluation was well informed and objective. I am grateful, too, for the funding provided by the Gannochy Trust to facilitate my engagement in this enquiry.

While this study was not conducted within the core hours of my contract at the University of Dundee, I am grateful to them for their continued support of my research endeavours, enabling me to hone my expertise in generating and analysing qualitative data such as that emerging from this enquiry.

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## Introduction

This report has been produced for the Gannochy Trust (GT) and Perth & Kinross Council (PKC) Service for Young People to present the findings of an enquiry conducted between March and May 2023 to evaluate the impact of their partnership arrangements for the delivery of a universal youth work (UYW) offer across the local authority area. The report includes details of the universal youth work provision supported by the partnership in communities throughout Perth & Kinross, and addresses the overarching objectives of the evaluation which sought to generate a deeper understanding of the impacts of the partnership arrangements, focussing in particular on:

- (i) the unique contribution made by the partnership;
- (ii) the drivers that have shaped the partnership's work; and
- (iii) the impacts of elements of the universal youth work offer supported by the partnership.

Undertaken to assist in determinations about whether or not to extend the partnership arrangements beyond the current funding period (due to end by April 2024), the evaluation sought to investigate the *mechanics* of the partnership, identifying what has worked (or not) and why. This necessitated an exploration not only of the way in which services have been commissioned and delivered, but also of the ways in which this unique partnership has contributed towards quality, impactful youth work provision in Perth & Kinross. It is intended that the findings of the evaluation will help the partners identify and prepare for legacy work to take forward the positive aspects of the partnership beyond the current contract period, in whatever format services are continued.

## Enquiry Design

The enquiry was designed collaboratively with PKC and GT officials as well as in discussion with staff involved in the delivery of funded activities. With sufficient time and resources, a more inclusive design process would have been implemented, involving some of the young people who access these activities in shaping and conducting the enquiry as well as analysing data and shaping the report. Nevertheless, the enquiry was conducted in as inclusive a manner as possible, with all staff, volunteers and young people provided with opportunities to contribute their views on the partnership, through participation in one or more of the processes detailed below.

The work needed to address the aims outlined above was broken down into three phases: a baseline study; fieldwork / primary data collection; and analysis.

### Phase 1: Baseline Study

Prior to putting arrangements in place for the fieldwork phase, an initial desk-based study was undertaken, generating contextual information that ensured the evaluation was informed by accurate, up-to-date and relevant policy, practice and funding information. This information was used to contextualise the Partnership's set of outcomes, and to frame the rest of the enquiry. The baseline study was comprised of two elements:

A **literature review**, identifying and critiquing research and practice-based studies to clarify: useful definitions and descriptors of universal youth work; the benefits of universal youth work provision (to young people, local communities, and public sector agencies); what constitutes 'good practice' in universal youth work; and the contribution strategic partnership working has to play in the delivery of high quality universal youth work.

Collating, reviewing and critiquing **contextual information** shaping the context of universal youth work provision in Perth and Kinross, including:

- Scottish Government policy, directives and guidance to local authorities on youth work provision.
- Perth & Kinross Council structure, policies and funding arrangements relating to youth work provision.
- Historical factors shaping the universal youth work partnership between PKC and GT.
- Details of current partnership arrangements and of service provision supported by the universal youth work partnership.
- Data relating to services supported by the universal youth work partnership and any evaluations of the work of the partnership or services it has supported since its inception.

## Phase 2: Fieldwork / Primary Data Generation

The fieldwork element of this evaluation was designed to generate sufficient reliable and impactful data to allow in-depth analysis against the proposed aims. The partnership is already in possession of an abundance of quantitative data, so the evaluation included fieldwork to generate qualitative data that were used to enhance our understanding of the partnership's impact. These data facilitated a critique the partnership's work, drawing on multiple perspectives of stakeholders, specifically people who were in a position to talk knowledgeably about the needs of communities and their young people, as well as having direct experience of the services delivered and the workings of the partnership itself. Capturing the views of a diverse range of informants (including staff and volunteers in each of the five areas where UYW is supported by the partnership, and young people attending activities in three of these communities) made it possible to triangulate the data, generating a more robust set of findings and recommendations.

Two methods were initially identified to generate data in the field: one-to-one and group interviews (for staff and volunteers); and online surveys (for young people). Having initially determined that an online survey would be a valid tool to capture the views of a large sample of young people, it was decided – on the advice of programme staff – not to use this approach, as it was felt that young people may be experiencing *survey fatigue*, having been asked to complete several surveys over the past couple of years. Instead, it was decided to conduct a small number of group discussions with young people at different settings, affording them the opportunity to interact with one another when sharing their views on the impact of their participation in the partnership-funded activities.

Using interviews allowed me to engage in deep discussion with participants, with each discussion framed by the same set of broad questions the shape of which was informed by the baseline study. No two interviews followed the same trajectory, as my approach

allowed me to be flexible in how I shaped my questions, reflecting variations in the participants' responses. In this was, I was able to guide the discussions, so that they remained focussed on relevant issues, but in such a way that allowed for deeper exploration of issues flagged up in these responses.

The group interviews were approached in a similar way, allowing the discussion to be shaped more by the participants, as each individual refined their contribution as they heard and reflected on the contributions of others in the group. I was able to frame these discussions in such a way that none were dominated by any individual, with all participants encouraged to contribute their perspective. As well as asking them to reflect on their experiences of participating in partnership-funded activities, I used these group discussions to encourage the young people to imagine an *ideal* future (i.e. what the ideal UYW provision would look like), based on their experience of the current provision.

## Analysis

Reflecting the *interpretivist* design of this enquiry, the analysis of data sought to foreground participants' views on the *purpose* and *impact* of universal youth work provision in Perth & Kinross). The different data sets (essentially interview recordings and field notes) were considered separately, and through repeated revisiting on these data I was able to implement a *reflexive thematic analysis* approach, systematically identifying themes from the data.

While there was considerable overlap in the perspectives shared during the interviews, it was important to include all divergent views in the report to limit the impact of any biases I brought to the analysis. In compiling this report, I have tried to present findings that draw together these different interpretations, referring back to the framework shaped during the baseline study.

Prior to submitting the final report, the draft findings were shared with people who participated in the enquiry, to ensure that the report provides an accurate reflection of the perspectives shared by informants. This was deemed to be a crucial step in ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings and conclusions.

## Context

### The PKUYW Partnership

The Gannochy Trust and Perth and Kinross Council formed a strategic partnership (*PKUYW Partnership*) in 2019 to support more collaborative, universal youth work provision. This initiative was devised in recognition of the fact that – while universal youth work provision is recognised as a foundation stone of quality provision<sup>1</sup> – it has been on the decline nationally<sup>2</sup>; the Partnership was established to ensure continued access to quality provision across Perth & Kinross. The rationale behind this was based on a number of realisations about provision locally: firstly, that their separate funding processes were incentivising competition rather than collaboration between local service providers, creating disincentives for them to share practice and support one another; secondly, that their separate application processes were causing duplication of effort on the part of these providers; and, finally, that not all parts of the area were being served equally in terms of young people's access to youth work activities, which both partners recognised as a vital element of provision. It was also intended that the Partnership would promote and sustain a more collaborative model of support that went beyond funding project delivery.

The partner agencies characterise the importance of youth work in the following terms:

Young people and youth work have a major role to play in society and in the development of vibrant communities. However, youth work in Scotland has been going through a challenging time, with the sector facing a significant reduction in resources. This unique collaboration between the Gannochy Trust and Perth and Kinross Council is aimed at 'bucking the funding trend', and harnessing the value of youth work.



The Partnership identified a series of intended outcomes which it was anticipated would impact on three different *loci* (young people accessing the services; organisations delivering universal youth work across Perth & Kinross; and the partnership and key local stakeholders). It was acknowledged that these would assume differing priority in the localities and contexts within which universal youth work provision is delivered, meaning

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<sup>1</sup> McGregor (2015); UK Youth (2021).

<sup>2</sup> A report by the YMCA (2020a) detailed how local authority expenditure on youth services dropped from £1.4bn in 2010-11 to just under £429m in 2018-19, resulting in the loss of 750 youth centres and more than 4,500 Youth Workers. Further research (UK Youth, 2021) demonstrated that the pandemic has added further pressure to the system, with nearly two thirds of youth organisations found to be at risk of closure, potentially leaving a generation of vulnerable young people without "life-changing support". These trends are broadly reflected in Scotland (Youthlink Scotland, 2020), where the work of Scotland's 80,000 Youth Workers and the 350,000 young people they work with is set against a backdrop of 'significant' funding shortfalls and the closure of crucial facilities.

that services would need to be flexible in order to reflect the changing needs of communities:

### Young people

- More young people have access to community-based youth work that provides them with a safe place to go, something to do, and somebody to talk to.
- Development of soft and hard skills that improve their life chances.
- Increased opportunities for developing and testing leadership and decision-making skills.
- Improved access to accreditation of non-formal learning.
- Giving young people a voice to influence services and decision making.

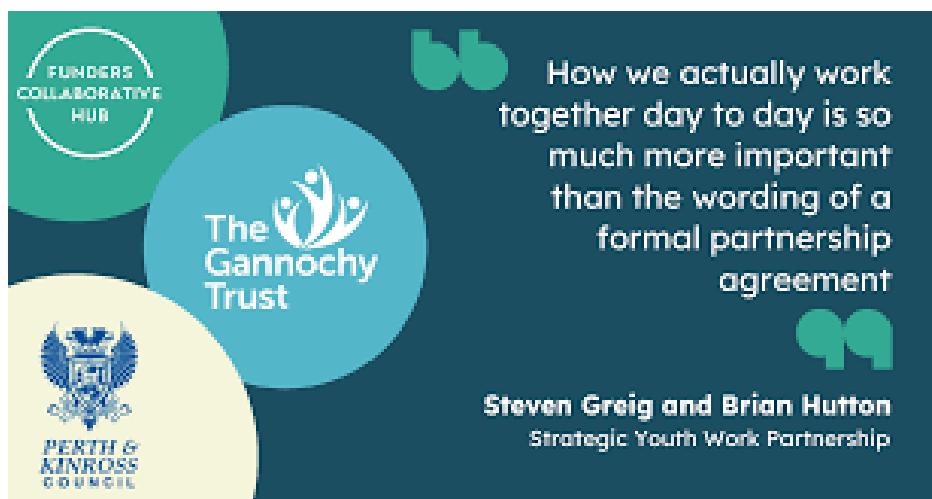
### Youth organisations

- Security and sustainability with core and programme support.
- Reduced time spent on applications and reporting with Gannochy Trust and Perth & Kinross Council.
- Shared knowledge, expertise and resources through structured networking and monitoring.
- Increased profile, voice and value from being part of an authority-wide collective.

### The partnership:

- Added value beyond that brought by the funding alone.
- Increased mutual trust for better future collaborative working.

These outcomes are enshrined in a Partnership agreement between the two lead partner agencies, and are reflected in the contracts with delivery partners (detailed below). As the quote framed in Figure 1, below, demonstrates, both lead partners recognise the importance of the quality of the relationships between agencies, outwith the formal processes:



*Figure 1: The Quality of Relationships & Collaboration*

PKC and GT shared the costs of the Partnership on a 50:50 basis, and – having invited bids to deliver provision across the five localities in Perth & Kinross (portrayed in the map in Figure 2, below) – awarded contracts as follows:

1. In **Kinross-shire, Almond & Earn**, KYTHE aims to serve young people by helping to meet their physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs.
2. Based in Crieff, LOGOS provides a safe, welcoming and caring environment for all young people in **Strathearn and Strathallan**.
3. **Perth City** is served by YMCA Tayside that runs a range of youth activities from its city centre hub as well as supporting other organisations to run activities across the city.
4. Covering **Highland and Strathtay**, the Breathe Project provide an environment that is safe, nurturing and loving; to build meaningful relationships.
5. Working together in the **East** are members of the Eastern Perthshire Youth Alliance (Strathmore Centre for Youth Development, Alyth Youth Partnership, Coupar Angus Youth Activities Group).



Figure 2: PUYW Localities

## Universal Youth Work

Universal youth work is an approach to working with young people that aims to provide opportunities and support to all young people in a given locality, regardless of their background or circumstances. This approach is based on the belief that all young people have the right to access services and support that will help them to develop their skills, interests and potential with a view to becoming responsible and active citizens<sup>3</sup>. Provided in such a way that access to both structured and less formal services – including recreation, sports, arts, social action, informal education, employability, health and wellbeing, etc. – is ‘open’ to all young people who choose to attend (i.e. they are not referred to the provision), engagement is voluntary and made on behalf of the young person<sup>4</sup>.

While universal youth work tends not to direct young people towards pre-determined outcomes, the practice of youth work is shaped by a commitment to engage young people in dialogue through which outcomes are negotiated<sup>5</sup>. For instance, having identified the most pressing needs of young people as ‘crime and safety’ and ‘mental health and wellbeing’, research<sup>6</sup> with 450+ participants at settings in London found that universal youth work and other group activity is seen as the most appropriate response to these needs.

Thus, universal youth work can be defined as a form of provision with open access and an open purpose or curriculum; although it will also have a specific focus, responding to young people’s needs. As with all forms of youth work, its purpose is to support young people’s social, emotional and educational development<sup>7</sup>.

### *Policy*

While universal youth work is often framed in policy discourse<sup>8</sup> as a way to promote social inclusion, prevent youth crime and anti-social behaviour, it has much wider ambitions than these specific outcomes might suggest, aiming to support positive youth development more broadly. For instance, the Council of Europe has recommended<sup>9</sup> that “... special attention should be paid to ... policies that promote equal access to youth work for all young people”, in recognition of the fact that youth work produces a wide range of positive outcomes for individuals, their communities and for society in general. These positive outcomes – deemed particularly important at a time of unprecedented challenges in Europe that have disproportionately negative effects on young people – underline the importance of all young people being given access to quality youth work, which:

- leads to critical reflection, innovation and change.
- contributes to young people’s well-being, enhancing a sense of belonging and strengthening their capacity to make beneficial choices.
- supports positive and purposeful transitions in personal, civic, economic and cultural life, enabling the development of competences that facilitate life-long learning, active citizenship and labour market participation.

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<sup>3</sup> NYA (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw-Walsh, Scanlon & McNeil (2021).

<sup>5</sup> Davies (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Thompson & Woodger (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Youthlink Scotland.

<sup>8</sup> e.g. DCMS (2022).

<sup>9</sup> CoE (2017): 2.

- promotes the development of various skills such as creativity, critical thinking, conflict management, digital and information literacy and leadership.
- enhances diversity and contributes to equality, intercultural understanding, civic participation, democratic citizenship and the values of human rights.
- strengthens young people's resilience and capacity to resist negative influences.

## UK Youth Work Policy

Youth Work has not sustained a high profile in government policy at the UK level over the past ten to fifteen years. The Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government's youth policy<sup>10</sup> heralded a pulling back by the State from the role of provider and funder of youth services, with the voluntary sector identified to meet the needs of young people in their community. This paradigm shift (which also included a downgrading of the government's commitment to eradicating child poverty) reflected the coalition government's wider political agenda, cutting government expenditure and services as part of their wide-reaching austerity programme<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, provision was made within *Positive for Youth* for a range of youth-centric initiatives, albeit targeted on perceived priorities which included disengagement from education and employment and youth violence and crime. Funding which had previously been made available to local authorities to support universal youth work provision was redirected to the National Citizenship Service, offering all 16-18 year olds in England access to a three-week programme of pro-social and developmental activities. This shift alone has had a devastating impact on open access provision, excluding young people from already marginalised communities and relying on a de-skilled workforce to deliver inadequate provision<sup>12</sup>.

Subsequent Conservative administrations have further downplayed government commitment to young people and youth work, with responsibility for policy passed between Departments, and promised policy statements deferred repeatedly. The impact of this has been the continued decline in universal provision, and a concerted move to divert practitioners' time away from fundamental elements of practice (relationship-building, group work, etc.) towards individualised, target driven work, effectively devaluing practitioners' tacit knowledges that have traditionally characterised their humane public professionalism<sup>13</sup>. Public spending on services for young people in England was cut by two-thirds in real terms over the first ten years of Conservative-led government, with large-scale funding announcements (such as the Youth Investment Fund) critiqued as recycled money, failing to make any contribution to either universal or targeted provision<sup>14</sup>. In their most recent pronouncement on youth policy for England<sup>15</sup>, the current administration has re-stated these arguable funding commitments as part of a *Youth Guarantee*, but fails to address the evident need for investment in universal provision, reflected in the wishes expressed by 6,000+ young people whose views shaped the review.

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<sup>10</sup> Cabinet Office & Department for Education (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Mason (2015).

<sup>12</sup> de St Croix (2017).

<sup>13</sup> Bradford & Cullen (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Stewart (2021).

<sup>15</sup> DCMS (2022).

## Scottish Youth Work Policy

All Scottish Government policy is framed within the National Performance Framework, which sets out nine National Outcomes<sup>16</sup>, the first of which relates specifically to children and young people, who should: “grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential”. Policies relating to young people are all shaped around the Scottish Government’s commitment to incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into legislation<sup>17</sup>, requiring public authorities to ensure they comply with children’s rights in all their decisions and actions, not just in relation to children’s services.

While technical issues delaying the ratification of this Bill are addressed, the Scottish Government’s Empowered Children and Young People’s Team continues to promote work around Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that children and young people have the right to express their views, be listened to and taken seriously in all matters that affect them; and that children and young people should be given the information they need to make decisions. Much of this work is channelled through the Young Scot initiative, a national youth information and citizenship charity which implements much of the Government’s policy agenda, including access to quality-assured information, support around mental health and emotional wellbeing, and managing the free bus pass initiative.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government shapes all children’s policy under the GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) framework<sup>18</sup>, an approach to improving the wellbeing of all children and young people in Scotland that originally incorporated the UNCRC and subsequently Goal 3 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>19</sup> (SDGs), both of which foreground wellbeing. Characterised<sup>20</sup> as a “transformational shift in the form of an agenda for change”, GIRFEC promotes a comprehensive approach to inter-agency collaboration for early prevention, based on a proactive and holistic conceptualisation of social support. Inclusion and accountability are built in to ensure welfare needs are addressed, and that children and young people can flourish, are treated with kindness, dignity and respect, and have their rights upheld at all times.

As portrayed in Figure 3, below, GIRFEC’s implementation incorporates a range of levels of engagement with children and young people, depending on their individual needs. This model suggests that universal services should be available for all who wish to access them, and that increasingly specialised services be able to respond to the needs of young people categorised as ‘vulnerable’, ‘at risk’ or whose behaviour is deemed ‘anti-social’ in some way; these interventions being designed to promote individualise ‘adjustments’ to help them exhibit more pro-social behaviours<sup>21</sup>. It is interesting to note that the GIRFEC hierarchy of service provision is reflected in the framing of universal provision within the PKUYWP vision (Appendix 3b). This characterisation of provision equates universal opportunities with a lower level of ‘risk’ and increased anchorage of the youth work offer within communities.

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<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2018).

<sup>17</sup> Scottish Government (2019).

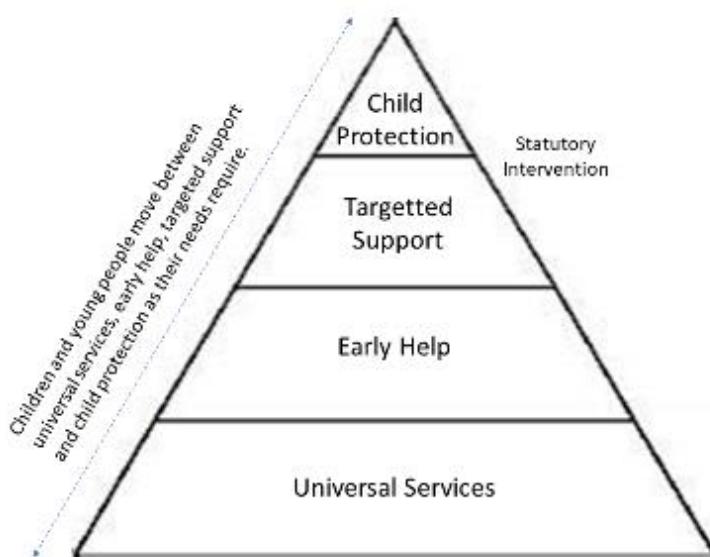
<sup>18</sup> Scottish Government (2022).

<sup>19</sup> UN (2015).

<sup>20</sup> Coles, *et al.* (2016): 355.

<sup>21</sup> Ord & Davies (2022).

In their Youth Work Strategy<sup>22</sup> (developed with Education Scotland and YouthLink Scotland), the Scottish Government underlined its commitment to making Scotland “the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up”, emphasising the rights of children and young people as being central to the achievement of this aim, and foregrounding the whole wellbeing of children and young people. Acknowledging the positive contribution made by youth work and its impact in improving the life chances of young people, the Strategy incorporates a series of targets which seek to ensure that all young people in Scotland have access to “high quality and effective youth work practice”. Specifically, it clarifies that universal and targeted youth work have “equal validity and importance”.



*Figure 3: GIRFEC Hierarchy of Service Provision*

Crucially, the Scottish Government does not allocate central resources to the provision of universal youth work, requiring<sup>23</sup> local authorities and other partners involved in delivering youth work as part of a wider Community Learning & Development offer to implement the Strategy and related pieces of legislation, making the best use of their own resources to achieve maximum positive impact. Effectively contradicting its stated view on the equality of universal and targeted provision, the Scottish Government has consistently funded initiatives addressing emerging policy priorities through targeted provision, including: the *Youth Guarantee* (providing guaranteed access to employment, training or educational opportunities for all young people aged 16 to 24); the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund (to support mainstream provision to help young people make up any ground lost in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic); Developing the Young Workforce (to prepare young people for the world of work); the Social Isolation and Loneliness Plan (also linked to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic); the Youth VIP (part of a national strategy volunteering framework for young people to develop skills and pursue career pathways through quality volunteering opportunities); and the SAFE Service (providing young people and their families access to free care and guidance after experiencing criminal activity).

<sup>22</sup> Scottish Government (2014); NB a revised Youth Work Strategy is due to be published imminently.

<sup>23</sup> Scottish Government (2013).

### *Outcomes*

The central role and value of universal youth work<sup>24</sup> is in “supporting and nurturing personal and social development for those young people engaged in the provision”. Its impact is felt across several domains which combine to make tangible improvements in the lives of the young people. As well and providing young people with a sense of safety and respite, in an environment where they can discover and “be themselves”, universal youth work fosters social and psychological wellbeing, supports the development of practical life-enhancing skills, promotes behavioural change, and enhances inter-personal relationships (*in situ* and in other areas of their lives). Ultimately, the young people who engage with universal youth work are supported in becoming responsible active citizens, through the following:

- building confidence (including self-worth and, sense of identity).
- developing skills for life (including employability, life skills, and accreditation).
- experiencing equality and inclusion (including reduced isolation, exposure to new experiences, and a sense of belonging).
- creating friendships.
- enhancing safety and wellbeing.
- strengthening the ability to lead and help others (including leadership skills, sense of responsibility, and community participation).
- nurturing the ability to get on well with others (including social skills; improved relationships with adults; and respect for others).

### **Outcomes Frameworks**

Many attempts<sup>25</sup> to generate generic frameworks representing desirable outcomes for young people generally have been promoted variously as tools to capture the outcomes attributable to universal youth work. Broadly speaking, these articulate the foregoing elements, relating them to different policy drivers, thereby making them useful tools in capturing ‘evidence’ of impact in increasingly managerialist cultures. Acknowledging that not all youth work activities should be concerned with achieving all identified outcomes at all times or in every intervention, the value of these kinds of frameworks is the flexibility in their application. As well as post factual evaluation, outcome frameworks are useful<sup>26</sup> in:

- Planning programmes and activities, including reference to the most salient outcomes, ideally negotiated with young people involved in order to agree their learning goals.
- Self-Evaluation and Improvement, identifying the outcome and indicators that demonstrate the impact of a service, programme or activity, or that of individual practitioners, to enhance the quality of youth work provision.
- Communicating impact, using language that is consistent and around which there is a shared understanding in the sector and further afield.

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<sup>24</sup> Fyfe, *et al* (2018): iii; 18.

<sup>25</sup> UK examples include: McNeil, Millar & Fernandez (2012); NYA (2013); McNeil & Stuart (2021).

<sup>26</sup> Youthlink Scotland (2018): [online](#).

- Framing partnership working, built around this common language and shared understandings captured in the framework.

## Scotland

Devised in consultation with agencies, practitioners and young people<sup>27</sup>, an outcomes framework for youth work in Scotland (Figure 4, below) incorporates seven outcomes describing the overarching impacts of youth work in young people's lives; eleven skills that enable young people to make progress towards these outcomes as a result of their engagement with youth work provision; and a set of indicators associated with these outcomes and skills, identifying observable and measurable behaviours. These are all framed<sup>28</sup> within the context of the Scottish Government's commitment to implementing the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the GIRFEC policies discussed above. Furthermore, the framework identifies pro-social characteristics which youth work should inculcate in young people, whom it suggests should be helped to become: responsible citizens; effective contributors; confident individuals; and successful learners.

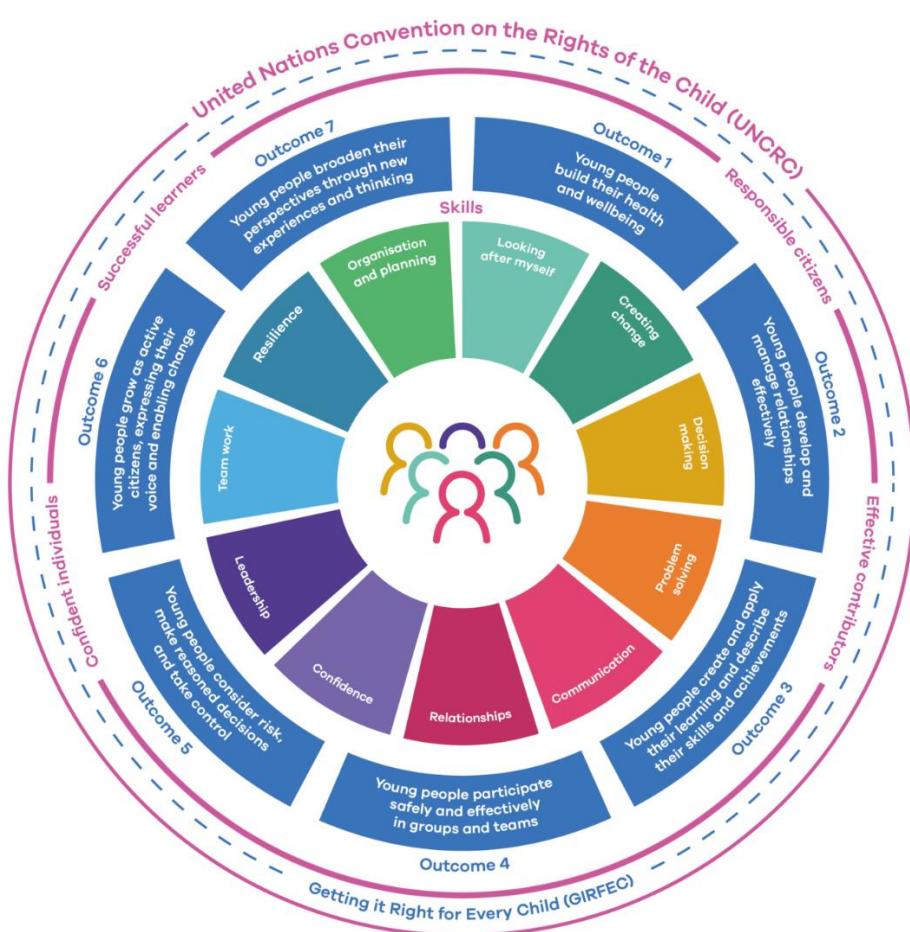


Figure 4: National Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework

<sup>27</sup> Youthlink Scotland: [online](#).

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix 3a for a graphic demonstrating how the outcomes are framed within the broader youth work policy environment.

As discussed above, it is recognised that not all the outcomes will apply in all youth work contexts or for every young person. The model allows young people and Youth Workers to negotiate context-specific outcomes, and to select indicators if and as appropriate. The outcomes and indicators are adaptable and are intended to provide the sector with a common language for to describe youth work practice and its impact on young people's lives.

### **Outcomes vs. Process**

It is important to recognise that profound transformations can occur in the life of a young person engaging with youth work provision without any of the outcomes detailed in the forgoing discussion having been observed or measured. Rather than fixate on the measurement of progress against these externally-determined outcomes, youth work evaluation should be clearly rooted in the *needs and realities* of young people's lives, capturing and valuing both the everyday and the remarkable elements of youth work practice<sup>29</sup>. Although it is important for youth work practitioners to be able to convey the purpose and impact of their work (particularly to demonstrate to funding partners that their money is being 'well-spent'), use of these kinds of outcomes frameworks and other performative indicator sets cannot fully capture youth work's distinctive contribution<sup>30</sup>. Rather, a process set out to analyse how Youth Workers operate, focussing in particular on the processes used to engage young people and the way in which they build trusting relationships with them, offers the potential to better understand how impact is achieved.

Several key elements of practice within universal youth work contribute towards the achievement of these impacts<sup>31</sup>. Foremost among these is the creation and perpetuation of a durable and deepening relationship with a trusted adult, focussed on and respecting the individual young person's needs and interests. Access to a safe space in which the young person is able to feel heard is a further crucial element, as is the collaboration with the Youth Worker on negotiating a learning agenda and devising a plan to address the young person's needs. Universal provision allows the practitioner to work effectively alongside others, often as a role model and giving praise and encouragement to young people in their care. Ultimately, universal youth work should incorporate aspects of inclusive practice, ensuring that all young people with an interest in engaging can be accommodated, feel welcome and valued, and support one another in participating.

### **Perth & Kinross**

A key challenge for this rapid evaluation was to balance consideration of the forgoing discussion, recognising the importance ascribed to the Partnership's pre-determined outcomes, locating consideration of these within the wider context as well as ensuring that the process elements of the universal provision was captured. Discussions with staff, volunteers and young people sought to generate a deeper understanding of the impact of Partnership-funded provision, and of the processes underpinning agencies' work with young people in the different localities.

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<sup>29</sup> Doherty & de St Croix (2019).

<sup>30</sup> Ord & Davies (2022).

<sup>31</sup> Fyfe, *et al* (2018); Sapin (2013).

## Findings

Interviews with practitioners covered a range of aspects, ranging from their underpinning philosophical considerations and approaches to engaging young people, to the ways in which their participation in universal youth work provision impacts on young people's personal, social and educational development. Similarly, discussions with young people covered a variety of issues, allowing them to share their experiences of engaging with the universal youth offer, concentrating on impact and engagement.

While every setting is unique, there were evident areas of commonality in contributions, as reflected in the headings in the following discussion. These themes are explored, with the voices of participants used throughout the discussion to illustrate the points being made.

### Generic & Individual Impact

The difficulty in capturing evidence of the impact of young people's engagement with universal youth work provision featured in all conversations with practitioners. The kinds of outcomes identified in the frameworks discussed earlier in this report can take years to come to fruition, at a point beyond the young person's engagement with the provision. Having said that, all practitioners were able to talk in detail about how individuals had progressed, and how groups had supported the development of their members in ways that would not have been possible without the universal offer providing space and support. One practitioner identified one overarching impact of the universal offer, arguing that it "may be making young people more confident to go it alone". Young people also felt comfortable talking about overall impact, focussing initially on the opportunities for socialising and the development of social skills in the first instance. Typical responses to questions about what they get from attending the universal youth work offer included:

"Mainly enjoyment out of being with my friends ..."; "I feel I've gotten closer to people ..."; "I don't get bored at home ... it gives me something to do ..."; and "It's been really helpful, because we get to talk to a lot of people that we couldn't talk to during covid ..."

Every practitioner was able to discuss the impact of their work from their own unique perspectives on the lives of the young people with whom they work. Recognising that their work is primarily with groups, it was acknowledged that the impact is – as one practitioner put it – "always going to be with individuals". Every practitioner was able to provide examples of individual young people whose life had been positively impacted by their work, some in the most extreme circumstances. For instance, one reeled off a series of examples in one breath, demonstrating the range and depth of aspects of young people's lives impacted by the PKUYWP offer:

"... the [suicidal] guy that was on the bridge who asked for help ... the guy who came through criminal justice and spent six weeks with [a colleague] in the workshop / job club where he developed the confidence to look out work, and came back for help in getting a job ... the disengaged kid who went on to get a college prize for achievement ...".

Young people all spoke in positive terms about the overall impact of the universal youth work offer, being able to distinguish between individual and collective benefits. When asked to articulate to funders reasons why they should continue, this young person brought these themes together into one simple statement:

“There’s lots of people here who rely on this place, as somewhere to escape from stuff that’s going on at school or at home ... as well as somewhere they can go to have fun, make new friends and gain loads of new experiences”.

Practitioners were invited to identify the areas on which they felt their work with young people had impacted the most (both in terms of the numbers of young people impacted and the extent to which impact was made individual circumstances). No prompts were used in shaping these responses, which generated a set of recurring themes, represented in the word cloud below (figure 5). There is a close alignment between these areas of impact and the outcomes attributed to universal youth work in the literature and outcomes frameworks discussed above.



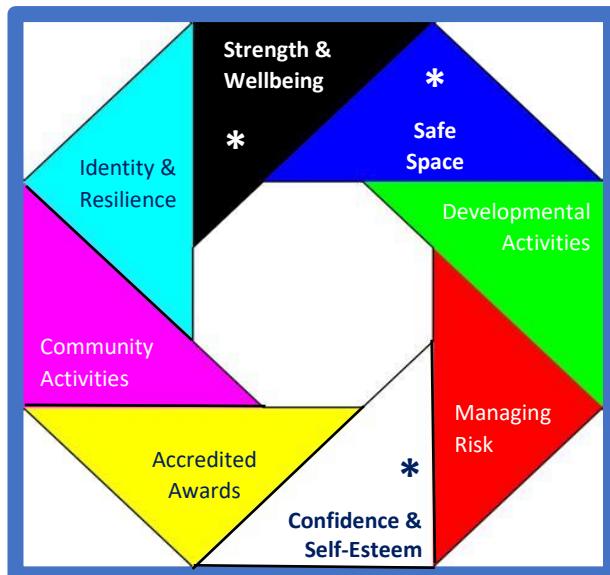
*Figure 5: Areas of Impact (Practitioners' Perspective)*

All of the outcomes in the Scottish outcomes framework are indicated here, with a focus on the softer skills alluded to in the PKUYWP goals. These emphasise the impact of the Partnership-funded offer on young people's ability to engage with one another and adults, skills that will help them in negotiating their futures. Practitioners reported that many young people lack these skills, something that has become increasingly problematic since the pandemic, and that access to the youth work offer has boosted communication skills and confidence, particularly for the less confident: “young people who'd ordinarily be sitting quiet just came to the fore”.

Young people in all three settings were invited to identify which of the eight areas of impact identified in PKUYWP literature applied to them (see Appendix 5b). This activity proved challenging for most participants, as all the young people said they felt that they had experienced all these impacts to differing extents and at different times throughout their engagement with the PKUYWP-funded provision. Hence, all eight areas are given equal weighting in Figure 6, below.

When asked to identify which of the eight areas they considered to have made the most significant impact on them, three areas (identified with \* in Figure 6) came to the fore: building confidence and self-esteem; having access to a safe space in which to participate in

group and other activities; and developing strength and wellbeing. Two further areas were included as having made the most significant impact, albeit some way behind the other three, namely: addressing issues around identity and resilience; and taking part in accredited awards programmes.



*Figure 6: Impact (Young People's Perspective)*

The youth work offer has been most impactful in the more remote, isolated communities where the Partnership has supported provision. The importance of the universal offer in creating opportunities to meet and develop relationships was highlighted by one practitioner:

“Because we’re the most isolated, it has opened up horizons for our young people, opportunities to meet others where meeting up outwith school can be so difficult”.

They also highlighted the benefits of the inter-community element of the offer, referring to the Perth & Kinross-wide events that have provided opportunities for young people from different communities to meet and interact:

“There is an aspirational element, too – the world isn’t confined to Aberfeldy! Because we can meet with these other groups, our young people can relate to them in spite of geographic diversity. The joint youth events are fantastic ... they get on really well and have made friends”.

One practitioner emphasised that one impact difficult to capture in single words relates to the extent to which a young person’s engagement with universal youth work helps them to change their mindset so that they can “make a positive impact on the community, rather than negative impact on themselves, their families and their community”. Access to a safe space, where young people can leave behind external pressures and concentrate on themselves and their own interests along with the opportunity to build relationships with trusted adults were seen as a crucial to this, ensuring that young people develop pro-social behaviours of benefit to themselves and the wider community. In this way, young people are “empowered to feel capable of doing and achieving”.

## Engaging & Achieving

An extensive range of activities is included in the universal youth work offer, offering both formal and informal learning opportunities; access to information, advice and guidance; and leisure and recreational activities. Information was provided by each partner agency demonstrating how they tailor their offer to the unique needs and interests of the young people attending their setting. Common elements offered across the settings include:

- Drop-in sessions, allowing young people to socialise with one another, engage in discussions with staff and volunteers, seek information, advice or guidance (from staff, volunteers or their peers), etc.
- Group discussions around issues identified by / negotiated with the young people themselves, reflecting topical issues and their current concerns.
- Awards-based work (including work towards Saltire, John Muir, Youth Scotland, DofE, High Five, and Dynamic Youth Awards; and completing tasks to contribute towards the attainment of academic qualifications).
- Community action (e.g. taking part in consultations, supporting a local community garden, fundraising for local charities, organising social events). Young people have led in organising much of this work, demonstrating “more initiative than in years gone by”, and developing a range of transferrable skills.
- Small group activities (including music, arts, leisure, etc. groups) providing young people with access to resources and support that would otherwise be unavailable or too expensive for them to access.
- Whole group activities / events (including the inter-group events and group specific activities in local communities and accessing unfamiliar places).
- *Ad hoc* activities framed around the young people’s interests.

The section on *Relationships* (below) details the importance of practitioners being able to develop purposive, professional relationships with young people in order to sustain their engagement in the youth work offer. Alongside this, practitioners emphasised the importance of the universal offer in providing activities that appeal to the interests of young people as a starting point to longer term, more developmental engagement, as this example illustrates:

“This group asked for a session on beauty techniques, which we ran so we could have conversations about positive choices ... it’s the means to have those conversations, because they’re at ease with you, relaxed enough to share things they might not otherwise”.

Every setting promotes and supports volunteering opportunities to the young people who engage with their offer, both within the setting / agency and in the wider community. These include roles (Young Leaders, Ambassadors, etc.) for older young people attending the universal youth work provision, helping staff to plan and run sessions and supporting younger people to get the most out of the offer. These develop volunteers’ skills and capabilities, including leadership, collaboration, planning and one-to-one support skills that are all valuable for future opportunities. In some cases, young people who volunteer in the running of sessions come together to form their own groups, to develop other areas of work

of interest to themselves and offering benefits to others. Practitioners see volunteering as a means to developing young people's capacity to participate fully in society, with one asserting that they: "strive for it not to be tokenistic, so they have genuine responsibility ... and can demonstrate they are trustworthy and accountable".

Furthermore, participation in volunteering is an integral part of many of the awards schemes, and volunteering is used as a way of encouraging young people to progress towards these, with one practitioner saying the impetus to progress comes from the young people themselves as much as from the staff: "there's definitely a peer sense of progression". As with the other activities outlined here, participation in volunteering through the universal offer helps young people move towards whichever positive destination is applicable to their circumstances, including employment, apprenticeships, work experience, or simply starting to attend class again.

All the young people involved in the discussion groups had taken part in some kind of volunteering at their setting, with most detailing how their involvement had progressed over time and as they gained skills and experience. Initial involvement is typically in a 'meeting-and-greeting' role, welcoming young people to the setting, and making sure new attendees settle in okay. Deeper engagement includes planning, setting up and running sessions, and 'peaks' at membership of management committees. In many cases, the volunteering is just a natural extension of their engagement with the provision at their setting. For a small number of young people, seeking out a volunteering opportunity to fulfil the requirements of an achievement award is the reason they approach the setting in the first place, and their engagement in youth work activities evolves from there. In most cases, young people who volunteer are encouraged to sign up (if they haven't already) for an achievement award that enables them to gain credit for their contribution.

Volunteering is also a first step on progression routes for young people, having a transformative effect in the life course of those who choose to follow such a route. One young man with whom I had a separate conversation started out at the setting five years ago, attending a weekly discussion group at school on a Thursday lunchtime, seeing it as "something fun to do really, as I didn't do much in high school really ...". This evolved quickly, as he was part of Boys Brigade, and needed to do some volunteering. Once the agency took up occupancy of a dedicated setting and their offer increased (thanks to the PKUYWP funding), he started to help out more often, focussing on providing food and drink for the other young people; to support him in this role, the setting helped him to access training in food preparation and hygiene. He has since left high school, and with the continued support of the Youth Worker has studied two courses at College and completed two apprenticeships; throughout all of which he has been able to undertake placements at the setting, all linked to his ongoing development. Clarifying how this has helped develop his confidence and communication skills in particular, he was at pains to stress that:

"Coming here has an impact on everyone who comes through the door. You ask a hundred young people who come here, and they'd all have something positive to say".

## Youth Voice

Supporting young people to gain their own voice and to work together to make themselves heard is something that all practitioners identified as central to their ethos and practice, with one typically saying that “youth voice runs through everything we do”. Typically, settings run *Youth Voice* groups as part of their universal offer, recruiting young people from the roster of regular attendees. These meet regularly to identify priorities on which they wish to campaign, or to respond to consultations being run by external bodies (including Community Councils, PKC and the Scottish Government). This usually starts at a very localised level, and develops as their confidence grows through the support provided to them by staff, with the youth voice group in one setting evolving from:

“identifying priorities for themselves … things to change in the club … helping with running the club … prioritising things to change in the community … and helping to shape Community Action Plans”.

Several examples were provided of young people taking action on issues identified by a core group, in one case running a large scale event, a conference with other organisations and over fifty young people in attendance. Indeed, the credibility of the group was such that the CEO of Perth & Kinross Council attended the event to hear the young people’s views. In another case, the Re-Make Community Connector will include youth representatives on its new vision group, again in recognition of the credibility of young people engaged in youth voice activities at their local PKUYWP-funded provision. A final example comes from Perth, where young people attending the youth voice group identified the isolation experienced by young asylum seekers and homeless young people in the city as a priority they wanted to address. They developed the *Food for Thought* project, and held meetings with local Councillors and national politicians to lobby for support. They have also contributed to the *Young Scots* consultation, the *Big Place* conversation, and commented on Council’s new youth strategy.

The conversations with young people were peppered with reference to the impact of universal youth work on their voice and influence, particularly when the discussions were focussed on how their engagement with the offer had impacted on their confidence and self-esteem. Throughout these, young people referred to the way in which their views are respected and acted up on by practitioners, in stark contrast to their experience with school-based staff; as one observed:

“School’s really, really formal … the teachers don’t really listen to you … they kind of just ignore you and make you do what they want …”, adding as a further point of contention: “they also forget your name …”.

Many of those who took part in the discussion groups were involved in voluntary roles at their setting, including participation in voice groups and in formal management structures. When discussing these, they made it clear that the young people are encouraged to engage in debates and decision-making about issues of concern to them. As well as contributing towards day-to-day decisions around the running of the youth work offer in their setting, young people indicated that they had developed collective views on a wide range of issues – as experienced at community, district,

national and international levels – including the climate emergency, community action plans, health and leisure services, and transport. Through their involvement in the universal youth work provision, young people said they had been helped in framing their engagement with formal consultations, to which they felt they had made a positive contribution, and for which they had earned respect, particularly from the local community.

### **Access to a Dedicated and Safe Space**

*"It brings a lot of people together who may not have anywhere else to go ..."*

The type of setting from which youth work provision is delivered varies across Perth & Kinross. All settings operate out of a dedicated space – including shop fronts on the high street, a space in a community-based health centre, rooms under a church, a network of basement rooms under high street shops, and a hall gifted to the community for young people and families – and frame opening hours around school closing times. The high profile locations of agencies and flexible opening times mean that the various services and activities offered at settings across Perth & Kinross are felt to be as accessible as possible to young people. In all cases, there is a strong sense that young people *respect* the space, and treat it accordingly. Young people indicated that the fact that the settings are so central and visible (i.e. not hidden at the outskirts of town) makes them feel valued as part of the community, something that has contributed to their pride in and respect for the buildings.

Attendance at drop-in sessions indicates that this positioning of the partner agencies has been successful in generating interest and engagement in the universal youth work offer, with one practitioner typically asserting that the young people “call it a second home” and benefit from knowing that “they can just drop in whenever they want”. One young person’s contribution resonated with this when they jokingly described the participation snowball effect:

“You start off coming on a Friday ... then you hear about the Thursday session, and go to that ... and then you’re here on a Monday and a Tuesday as well ... then you live here and only visit your house”.

This detailed contribution<sup>32</sup> from one young person who has been a regular participant in one of the settings demonstrates not only the importance of space, but also the complexity of the interactions it has been possible to sustain within the space, and the multi-layered impact of their extended involvement in PKUYWP-sponsored activities:

*"We've had the lounge for about 3 months now and it's coming on amazingly. Before we had the lounge everything we did was at the church and now we have a different place just to come and chill and be ourselves. I've been involved with Breathe since I was in P5 so that's 6 years. I've been on 3 committees and I'm now on the 'Voice committee'. I've been involved in lots of things with Breathe over the years including our 24 hour event, Alton towers, PX2 and the Genesis summer programme. We've done various presentations in Perth and in Aberfeldy. Besides getting points across and letting people know our opinions it increases*

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<sup>32</sup> Accessed [here](#) during the course of the enquiry.

*our confidence and builds our self-esteem. I think the Breathe lounge is a really good place to be because we can all be ourselves in a really cool place and we've still got loads of cool ideas for this place if we're able to keep it. We've put a lot of work into making the lounge look fun and cool and as a bonus we get to do all this stuff with the people we love."*

The diversity in settings has generated some differentiation in the young people's experience of the offer, depending on which community they live in. Practitioners report that settings which afford young people some degree of 'ownership' of the space generate a deeper level of engagement, providing more opportunities to work with them on positive activities and developmental programmes. More than one partner agency clarified that attendance has increased as a result of having access to a dedicated space, when they previously ran a limited open access offer out of local churches. Regular engagement in activities seems to be enhanced where the young people are allowed to design the space, allowing them to stamp their individual and group identities on the environment, making it more comfortable and inviting to them<sup>33</sup>.

Even in settings with limited space or where the terms of the lease limit the scope for young people to make the space 'their own', practitioners report that partners recognise the potential benefit of having access to these 'safe' spaces to young people who experience a range of challenges. One of many examples cited involves a young man with profound developmental and mental health issues for whom the universal setting is the only place that they feel comfortable, and where their behaviour does not present a threat to themselves or others. As a result, they spend a lot of time at the setting, where they have been able to make progress in a number of areas, resulting in the number of critical incidents reducing considerably. Another example reflecting practitioners' continued efforts in another setting relates to the experience of a young woman with down syndrome and others with autism whose parents "have come to really trust us" with their children, as practitioners are "managing to just about make it a safe space for them".

Another factors about the spaces from which the universal offer is run that enhance engagement include the fact that they are warm. Some young people are reluctant to return to cold homes after a day at school, as their families struggle with the cost of living crisis and the increase in energy prices. Similarly, most of the settings provide food during sessions, ranging from drinks and biscuits at drop-ins to pizza night; this is recognised as a big draw for many young people, and contributes to sustained high levels of engagement.

For many young people, the importance of having access to a space that they can consider and treat as their own cannot be overstated. In one participant's view access to an alternative space to home is important, as "it helps me get out of the house instead of just festering in my room". Young people value having somewhere they can go which operates outwith the usual strictures that they need to navigate, both school and home requiring adherence to rules set by others, who enforce limits on what young people can and cannot do, and impose their expectations on young people's behaviour. The sense of freedom –

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<sup>33</sup> It must be acknowledged that this may come at a cost, in that young people not involved in the process might feel excluded or less welcome.

both to be oneself and to act on one's own preferences – is appreciated and embraced by the young people engaged in all of the group discussions.

As we know, young people are very aware of what adults and professionals think and say about them. Some responses to questions around the impact of the universal youth work offer reflected this, with one young person stating that “... as the adults in our lives like to say, it ‘keeps us off the streets’ ... !?!”.

Additionally, young people in all settings emphasised the importance of having access to a space where they feel ‘safe’. Two young people in one discussion framed this around the access these spaces provides to trusted adults:

“I feel like we need a safe space, ‘cause if you want to talk to someone, they’re always here to talk to us ...” “things you wouldn’t want to talk to your parents about ... and you don’t want to be at home ...”

For other young people, these dedicated, youth-friendly spaces provide them with the opportunity to be themselves (as opposed to fulfilling other people’s expectations of them), and to explore their identities safely; as one young person put it, “being yourself in a space where it’s alright to be ‘different’ ... somewhere you can feel you belong whoever you are”. Other contributions reiterated the link between access to a safe space and fully occupying their own identity, including this observation:

“It’s a place you can come and you don’t have to worry about anything, really ... you can be who you are ... it’s more difficult in other places ... you’re with people you like and who are more likely to accept you”.

This, and other similar comments, suggests that access to dedicated spaces help young people cope with external pressures that contribute towards the crisis in young people’s mental health<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, when discussing the impact of the PKUYWP-funded provision on their wellbeing, young people across the different settings emphasised the significance of poor mental health as a factor in their own lives or/and those of many of their friends. With pressure to perform academically recognised as one of the key causes of mental ill health among young people, it was encouraging to hear one young person detail how access to the youth work space helps them to decompress:

“It’s a nice wind-down, especially with having the after-school session. When you’ve just come from a stressful day at school, it’s a good place to come and have an hour to calm down after all of that”.

## Inclusivity

As referred to throughout these findings, practitioners highlighted the efforts they make to ensure that their provision is inclusive. Elements of anti-oppressive practice featured throughout discussions, with practitioners at pains to highlight the importance of equality and diversity issues in their work, not only to promote inclusion *per se*, but also as these issues are evidently of such importance to young people generally. This contribution from

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<sup>34</sup> WHO, 2015.

one practitioner typifies the approaches cited by their youth work colleagues in other settings:

“We work really hard to provide whatever support works for each young person.

We will even meet them on the street to walk in with them ... and we take note of trigger issues for individual young people, and have plans in place to remove them to a safer space if needed”.

Whatever the nature of the space, practitioners emphasised the importance of ensuring that it feels ‘safe’ for all young people to attend, making it “as open and welcoming as possible” and thereby ensuring an “inclusive feel”. As one practitioner said, partner agencies also “cast a fairly wide net” when promoting and recruiting participation in their universal offer.

Given that the wider community of Perth & Kinross does not demonstrate particularly wide ethnic diversity, it would be unreasonable to expect the universal offer to be able to demonstrate such diversity in their young participants. Nevertheless, practitioners emphasised the diversity in the make-up of their groups, in terms of age, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality and particularly socio-economic status. Perhaps reflecting perceptions of the offer referred to elsewhere, one typical comment on diversity asserted that “*Quite a lot* of our young people come from ‘challenging’ socio-economic backgrounds, especially those who transition to targeted provisions”. Reflecting wider trends<sup>35</sup>, several practitioners referred to the high numbers of young people with whom they work “going through gender fluidity or working out what they identify as or transitioning” or/and reporting mental health problems. Other national trends<sup>36</sup> reflected in Perth (and other larger urban centres around the UK), the numbers of young asylum seekers, travellers and young people experiencing homelessness accessing the open access and targeted sessions continues to increase. The universal provision is able to provide opportunities for young people from such a diverse range of backgrounds to come together, share experiences and develop relationships is potentially of significant benefit, as community connectedness and cohesion become increasingly important<sup>37</sup>.

## Group Work

Universal youth work is distinct from more targeted provision in that it is almost exclusively delivered through group-based activities, or in group settings, as opposed to being an individualised intervention. Practitioners made some interesting observations about the impact of this approach to facilitating the engagement of young people across two distinct dimensions.

Common to all settings was recognitions that participation in universal youth work provision enhances young peoples’ ability to work with others, developing communication and negotiation skills as well as the ability to work towards common goals with their peers and to compromise when necessary. These were all seen as important generic skills and of particular value in relation to future employment, with one practitioner citing as an example

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<sup>35</sup> WHO (2015); LGBT Youth Scotland (2022).

<sup>36</sup> Scottish Refugee Council (2019).

<sup>37</sup> Scottish Government (2020).

a youth band that “has come from a group of guys who were good individually, but have now learnt to work together” suggesting that their motivation had transformed through their group experience from pursuing individual goals to serving their community, something they characterised as “activism”.

Another reflection on the impact of group work in the universal settings demonstrated how it brings together individuals with hugely diverse backgrounds and personalities, and how engagement in such groups served as a means of minimising and moderating conflict between otherwise antagonistic groups and individuals. As one practitioner observed, this feature of coming together in new groupings:

“builds up the thing that they all have a lot in common, including new friends they wouldn’t otherwise meet ... learning about each other and developing the confidence to chat and intermingle. Even with a ratio of sixty young people to seven staff, we can totally trust them”.

Another practitioner took this a step further, suggesting that – although many of the younger people struggle with collaboration, as they are less used to in-person interaction than others due to the impact of covid – they had seen “evidence of a lot of patience in there as well ... kids able to accommodate one young person’s particular challenging behaviour ... demonstrating kindness and friendship”.

The particular power of group work was explained by another respondent who explained that it affords staff the opportunity to “have conversations about positive choices ... it’s the means to have those conversations, because they’re at ease with you, relaxed enough to share things they might not otherwise, to talk about different scenarios ... and be open to ... signposting and encouragement”.

## **Relationships**

Discussions about their relationships with young people featured centrally in all interviews with practitioners, and an expanded exploration of their thoughts on this critical aspect of practice is included in Appendix 4. The starting point for relationship-building from one typical practitioner’s perspective is the fact that “every young person has chosen to be here. If they’re here it’s because they want to be. So, we chat to them, get to know them and to understand why they are here and what they want from us”. Crucially, this initial interaction needs to be able to “reassure young people that this is a safe space”, to enable them to open up to the practitioner and share their aspirations for their time with the youth work provision. This process of “meeting them where they’re at” (as one practitioner put it) allows practitioners to negotiate a trajectory with each young person based on their starting point and on information shared by Youth Workers reflecting the interests, capabilities and needs identified in these early interactions.

The fact that the universal offer enables practitioners to offer continuity and consistency to the young people who engage was also identified as a key benefit of this approach, something that is not possible in short term, targeted interventions. The open-ended nature of the offer allows practitioners to “*develop* a relationship, getting alongside, supporting and encouraging [the young person] on an ongoing basis”. Additionally, this allows young

people to choose whether to participate on a continual basis; the fact that they have strong relationships with Youth Workers means that they can “pick up where they left off” if they haven’t attended for a while. Typically, this reflects the fact that Youth Workers remember pertinent details about each young person, and can “be excited for their excitements”.

Having Youth Workers employed under the universal offer affords partner agencies flexibility in how they initiate contact and start building relationships with young people. In several instances, practitioners reported on outreach activities, where Youth Workers gain access to young people in other settings to promote the open access provision and start the process of building relationships, so that young people will feel comfortable in engaging with them. As one practitioner outlined, their setting targets the local High School for a few weeks at a time, “hanging out just on the outskirts of the grounds to build relationships with young people during lunchtime” to promote engagement in their universal offer and other activities, or signposting them on to other services; where they encounter “little resistance to chatting from young people”. In another setting, a similar approach was described as “lunchtime walkabouts … that allow us to pick up some kids who don’t / aren’t able to come”.

Most practitioners described elements of a person-centred approach to supporting young people, recognising the importance of being able to demonstrate empathy and unconditional positive regard<sup>38</sup>. In all cases, practitioners’ commitment to young people’s progression and empowerment was reflected in the way in which they navigate the relationship so that it becomes less directive the older they become, affording young people the space to make their own decisions and act under their own initiative. This does not mean abandoning the young person, rather it means that “when we hand over the reins to the young person, you really have to let them get on with it and see how it goes … watching from a distance but being there when they need us”. This way of working is invaluable in supporting safe transitions for young people.

Young people were unanimous in their praise for the Youth Workers, other staff and volunteers at the settings, all providing testimony about the importance of the relationships they have with these trusted adults. Staff 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. As one young person observed:

“You know that they’re always there … with an open mindset … you can go with a problem or question, and get a different outlook on things”.

Young people appreciate the fact that practitioners do not try to force their own agendas on them (although their suggestions about possible courses of action – in both one-to-one and group contexts – are welcomed), and that they are open to young people setting the direction for programmes and shaping activities. It is clear from what young people say that practitioners in all the settings have approachable, engaging and empathetic personalities,

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<sup>38</sup> Rogers (1957).

which makes it easier (than in school, for instance) for the young people to share their aspirations, anxieties and ideas. Most practitioners received testimonials not dissimilar to this reference to one (whose name has been changed to spare her blushes):

“Adele’s really sweet ... so she’s the first person I would go to if I had a problem ... she’s like one of the nicest people ever ...”.

## Practitioner Motivation

The value of universal youth work in allowing the process to be shaped not by external players, but by young people themselves was foregrounded throughout all these discussions. The phrase “starting where young people are at” was used by more than one practitioner, all of whom saw this as being the bedrock of universal provision, respecting young people’s agency and affording them the opportunity to frame their involvement in provision around issues and activities that interested them. This is not to say that practitioners do not bring agendas, themes or activities to the table; but it does mean that responsibility for shaping the curriculum is shared between practitioners and young people themselves, thereby increasing the likelihood of participation being sustained and impact maximised.

As explored in greater detail in Appendix 4, practitioners’ commitment to the care of the young people with whom they work features at the heart of their intrinsic motivation for doing the work they do. This was captured in one Youth Worker’s claim:

“I think you don’t open your doors if you don’t care ... we have a will to make a positive difference in other people’s lives in the community”.

Discussions with young people around the nature of their relationships with practitioners, and the way in which practitioner demonstrated their care for young people in particular, generated enthusiastic contributions, again providing testimony to the motivation and how it impacts on young people. As one young person struggled to articulate:

“They’re very caring people ... it’s like feeling there’s always going to be someone there for you, just for you ... because sometimes that can be quite difficult in your everyday life ...”.

Furthermore, it is evident from speaking with practitioners that they all feel a deep sense of connection to the communities in which they work. For many of them, the community in which they work is also the place they live, and this has given them a high profile and degree of recognition within the wider community. For one practitioner, living and working with the community is “key for rural youth work”. In many instances, practitioners detailed cases where they had been involved in work outwith their setting, because a member of the community or a young person had approached them for information or support with an issue. This connection with the young people and their families as well as other members of the community was discussed in entirely positive terms by all practitioners; however, it must be recognised that the blurring of personal and professional lives and relationships can have a detrimental impact of staff wellbeing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that many of the gaps in service provision caused by austerity-driven cuts have been filled by community-based faith organisations<sup>39</sup>, nearly all of the partner agencies promote themselves as Christian groups, many having evolved out of local churches where some still make some youth work provision. For many of the practitioners, their work with young people represents the embodiment of their Christian ethos of love and care; some even cited passages from scripture in discussions about this aspect of their practice. Their work also represented the enactment of their faith's call to service, with one typical observation foregrounding this:

“We need to look to community groups like the church to see how the church can serve the needs of the community, not *vice versa*”.

All practitioners in these settings were open to challenge about the foregrounding of religion in their publicity, and acknowledged that this has the potential to serve as both a facilitator and barrier to young people's engagement, depending on their / their families' perspectives. It was clear that there have been occasions when young people have not engaged with any or some provision because of their perception of the initiative being to proselytise for Christianity (most often when activities were provided from church settings); though these numbers are felt to be small, and quite often young people overcome their misgivings and attend (as word of mouth from their peers and effective outreach provision disavows them of their misconceptions). One story shared from one setting told of a young man whose family expressly forbade their attendance at the setting, as they felt the Christian orthodoxy would contradict the teachings of their own faith. In this case, the young man exercised agency, ignoring their parents' wishes and continuing to attend (presenting practitioners with the dilemma of responding to his expressed needs and interests, while being sure not to undermine familial relations).

It was clear from discussions with young people that they have no issue with the presence of Christian materials (posters, booklets, etc.) in the settings, saying that they are offered opportunities to discuss faith and spirituality *if they wish*. In most settings, agencies run faith-based / youth ministry activities alongside the universal youth work offer, and – if the show an interest – young people can be signposted to these. In one setting, the young people talked about this, joking that they referred to one such opportunity as “Jesus Club”, while young people in another said they were happy for religious themes or spiritual matters to be scheduled occasionally as the subject of their discussion groups. From the young people's viewpoint, it seems that they are able to respect practitioners' faith because they are open about their motivation, although for the majority they don't share those beliefs.

## **Wider Participation**

All practitioners claimed that the provision of universal youth work in their setting has enhanced other offers, both activities run by the partner agencies utilising other funding streams and initiatives run by other organisations in their local community and at district level. One participant reported that the universal offer “has enhanced all aspects of our work”, including their detached and holiday provision. Young people also indicated that

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<sup>39</sup> Financial times (2019). How churches are filling the gap left by UK austerity cuts.

engagement in the youth work offer opened up their access to other opportunities, with many participants describing how they had engaged in wider activities after attending the setting. One group went so far as to agree with one participant's assertion that "... *most people* that come here do stuff outwith school as well".

At a local level, work with High Schools (including one-to-one sessions, group work and drop-ins) features in the wider offer of nearly all partner agencies, all of whom were able to confirm that the universal offer complements their engagement with young people in more formal settings in a number of ways. For instance, practitioners identified the fact that they are able to utilise a more relational approach than school-based staff as a 'way in', especially in forming connections with some of the more disengaged young people. One articulated how it is possible for them to work with young people in a different way to teachers, who are constrained by the need to deliver a set curriculum to a large group while enforcing the school's disciplinary code, as they can "offer them space and support, someone to talk to that they trust, someone that is not trying to steer them in a particular direction, and who see it from their point of view".

Most practitioners argued that being able to bring groups of young people (e.g. those with low attendance or exhibiting disruptive behaviours) off campus and into their own PKUYWP-funded settings to carry out targeted provision generated higher levels of engagement, resulting in better outcomes for those young people than if activities were run in classes or other areas in school. Young people themselves said that they had found it easier to engage with the developmental activities on offer when they were relocated from school to a youth work setting.

## Partnership

Practitioners were unanimous in the view that the nature of the relationships between delivery agencies has changed significantly as a result of their participation in the Partnership. The prevailing culture has transformed from one in which agencies viewed each other as 'the competition' to one which is much more "supportive, encouraging, sustainable" (GA). As one practitioner put it, "we just want what's best for young people ... it's not seen as encroaching on other people's territory when we're doing outreach on their patches". Another suggested that previously, "we were working away in our own silos ... worried about others coming into our patch. Now we're coming together more, talking and learning from one another, sharing examples of good practice".

In practice, this is demonstrated by the fact that the agencies – having previously competed against one another for funding opportunities – now cooperate to generate joint bids to ensure the organisation best placed to meet the needs of young people is foregrounded in bids. One partner has taken a lead in applying for the group, and there is recognition that "if/when partnership ends, we'll have to work together to secure continuation funding". Another positive financial impact of the partnership approach relates to the fact that membership of the partnership means that smaller groups have benefitted from external recognition of the impact of the partnership overall when submitting their own bids for funding (e.g. LOGOS' bid for *Young Start* funding). Similarly, funding bodies are impressed by

the longevity that the smaller organisations have sustained through the partnership funding, giving them greater confidence in awarding money.

The creation of one larger initiative, made up of disparate elements, was identified as providing strength, in the generation of a “critical mass of [universal youth work] practice that can’t be ignored”. Furthermore, as another practitioner noted, engagement in the partnership has: “helped with our credibility. We could be viewed as just a little rural project, but it’s good to be seen as part of something bigger”. The “semi-regular meetings between partners” (i.e. including both formal and informal networking) serve to “build trust and the ‘community’ feel” that is seen to make the partnership approach work through a “*can do* attitude that really is all about the young people”.

Practitioners at different agencies report that they have benefitted from being able to seek support and learn from one another, benefitting from “not just the financial backing but the experience of bigger projects”. Likewise, several made reference to the value of the inter-group events<sup>40</sup>, organised collaboratively between partner agencies to bring together young people from different communities and settings, allowing the whole to benefit from the specialisms of individuals partners and practitioners.

## Equity / Geographic Coverage

The issue of equity came up in more than one discussion, with practitioners acknowledging that the resources at their disposal only allow for activities to be offered in a relatively limited number of communities, albeit spread across Perth & Kinross. As one practitioner asserted:

“It is morally wrong to provide an every-day service here, but only part time for eight weeks a year elsewhere. We need to be able to provide an equitable (and not tokenistic) service, especially as we hear reports of young people ‘running wild’ in communities down the road”.

As indicated in Appendix 1a, Perth & Kinross is a predominantly rural district, comprised of hundreds of towns, villages and hamlets outwith the administrative centre of Perth city. Those settlements listed in Appendix 1b have been identified to illustrate the potential demand for open access services if the term ‘universal’ is to be applied literally; all having sufficient population to house latent demand for youth work services similar to those included in the Partnership’s current offer. While it would be unreasonable to expect provision in each and every settlement, there is perhaps merit in thinking about a strategy that ensures that young people living outwith the resourced communities know about and have access to some kind of youth work provision, however limited.

Two of the agencies enhance their universal offer through the use of mobile units, taking staff and resources to outlying areas to provide young people in these more remote and less well-served communities with some opportunities to benefit. This sought to help these young people to overcome the key barrier to accessing provision, namely transport (or the lack of it). As one practitioner asserted:

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<sup>40</sup> Including music events organised by KYTHE; the Y Games; the GT Youth Panel; etc.

“Transport is a crucial issue in rural provision, causing frustration for the young people. We do what we can, but there are always limitations to what you can do”.

## Other Findings

### *The Relationship between Universal and Targeted Provision*

The Universal Youth Work Partnership does not work in isolation. As detailed in Annex 3, the activities supported by PKUYWP run alongside and complement a wide range of services for children, young people and families throughout Perth & Kinross. What is unique about the work under consideration here is the intention that it should be accessible to all and any young people who choose to engage with the opportunities provided; whereas most of the services in Annex 3 are targeted in some way, to address particular issues of concern or to support children and families exhibiting certain characteristics deemed worthy of intervention. It is, of course, possible that many of the young people accessing the Partnership’s universal youth work offer will also be accessing one or more of these other services. Practitioners were at pains to stress that – when they become aware of any young person in such a situation – they strive to remain consistent in their work with them, to ensure that their experience of the PKUYWP initiative feels less stigmatising than targeted provision, which is often perceived in a negative light due to the pejorative judgement implied in being identified as needing such services.

Exploring these sensitivities further, practitioners highlighted how universal provision has proven to be beneficial to young people needing more intensive support. These young people were characterised in two ways: not appreciating that they needed additional help; or lacking the wherewithal to request or access that support. In both cases, practitioners have been able to discuss their circumstances with many young people, enhancing their understanding of their own circumstances and needs, and signposting them onto other services (sometimes accompanying them to help them over the initial barrier to engagement), while maintaining the relationship through the universal service.

Perceptions of the open-access youth offer were identified by more than one practitioner as a factor with the potential to further complicate this relationship between targeted and universal services. In one case, it was suggested that the universal offer is seen by some parents as “serving kids with a higher tariff need”, which could be interpreted as “posh folk not wanting their children mingling with poorer kids”. In another community, examples were provided of the community approaching staff to encourage the engagement in universal provision of particular young people thought to be ‘problematic’, in the hope that this might help them embrace more pro-social attitudes without the need for participation in ‘more challenging’ interventions.

### *Perth & Kinross-Wide Initiatives*

Participation in PKUYWP-funded activities has developed the skills and interests of young people from all localities in such a way that partner organisations have been able to channel their energies into activities beyond their local communities, to the benefit of the wider

community. The few examples detailed here demonstrate the impact the partnership has been able to make in unanticipated areas.

### Youth Voice

Efforts have been ongoing recently to re-establish the Perth & Kinross Youth Council, with a view to including voices from the most marginalised and excluded groups, whose members are least likely to self-nominate for participation. As a result of this work, membership of the Youth Council is likely to include young people active in groups such as the *Fun Young Individuals* (care-experienced young people) and *GLOW* (Gay, Lesbian or Whoever).

Through engagement with PKUYWP, it should now be possible to broaden the geographic representation on the Youth Council, so that more communities of place are represented in their activities and deliberations (including participation in the national *Gathering* event).

Having gained experience in the youth voice initiatives supported by their local youth work providers, young people now have the ability to step up to the Perth & Kinross-wide role with confidence. As a result, the number of young people who attend Youth Council events has been bolstered by the work of PKUYWP; as have the numbers and diversity of young people attending *ad hoc* events organised by the Youth Council. As one beneficiary of the universal youth work offer in Kinross observed<sup>41</sup>:

“The Perth and Kinross Youth Voice Gathering was the most unique but effective event I’ve been involved with. It takes effort – you need to start early, find a range of voices and make sure nobody is drowned out.”



### Youth Empowerment

The Gannochy Trust has established a dedicated Youth Panel Fund of £100,000 per annum to be managed and allocated by a panel of twelve young people from across Perth & Kinross who have received training and support to prepare them for the responsibilities involved in the process. Funding is available to local and national charities in support of organised activities for young people, youth voice initiatives, and services addressing young people's health and wellbeing.

Many of the panel members have been recruited via the PKUYWP delivery organisations, drawing from an extensive pool of young people who have been involved in governance

<sup>41</sup> As captured in a LGIU briefing on the Youth Council's effectiveness in engaging diverse communities (2020).

arrangements in their own settings. This has ensured that the Youth Panel Fund has been able to get up-and-running in a relatively short space of time, with panel members recruited in late 2022 and the fund launched in spring 2023 after the initial training.

The Youth Panel initiative has benefitted from the input of young people whose skill set and confidence have been enhanced by their participation in the various PKUYWP-funded activities. Furthermore, their participation in this initiative – only made possible by the Partnership's groundwork – has been an empowering process, as young people have taken responsibility for decisions over substantial amounts of money and in shaping the communities that benefit from the award of grants.



### **District Youth Sports Event**

Practitioners and staff at all settings spoke enthusiastically about their participation in a district sporting event, hosted by the YMCA, for whom this has been an annual event for some time. Young people enjoyed the competition, although it was apparent that they didn't take things too seriously. In particular, they enjoyed meeting people from different parts of Perth & Kinross, who they would not have had the chance to meet otherwise. Practitioners commented on how they had seen the enjoyment fuel increased confidence among the young people who participated, and that the conversations they had subsequently with young people indicated that the event has helped to broaden their horizons somewhat.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

As indicated by the breadth of issues covered in the foregoing discussion, the provision supported by the Perth & Kinross Universal Youth Work Partnership has made great inroads across all localities, impacting positively on the lives of young people from the remotest parts of Highland Perthshire to the most deprived communities in Perth city. While a quantitative analysis was not within the purview of this evaluation, it is clear from discussions with practitioners and young people alike that the PKUYWP-funded provision operates at a consistently high level of engagement throughout the year, including setting-based provision, outreach and in some cases detached work.

### Partnership's Unique Contribution

The Partnership has made a unique contribution to the Children & Young People's Service landscape across Perth & Kinross. Apart from being the only such partnership operating in this field, the PKUYWP has enabled the delivery of opportunities for young people across Perthshire and Kinross that are no longer available in an increasing number of local authority areas across the country.

Making funding commitments beyond single financial years is also atypical; something that has enabled providers to maintain staff teams, thereby ensuring consistency and continuity in their provision. Funding has also been used to create dedicated spaces for youth work provision in each of the seven communities out of which the partnership-funded activities are run, at a time when youth clubs are being closed throughout the country. The central locations of these settings contribute to young people's sense of being valued by their community, and secures a high profile for the Partnership's work, fostering greater cohesion with the wider community.

The way in which the partnership operates fosters collaboration between the delivery partner agencies, again countering a trend towards heightened competition for increasingly scarce funds between third sector organisations. Practitioners at the partner agencies have benefitted from the knowledge and expertise of their colleagues in other parts of Perth & Kinross, and have engaged in joint initiatives that might not otherwise have taken place. Although familiar with one another's work prior to joining the Partnership, these agencies have developed connections based on trust, respect and mutuality, all fostered through their involvement in delivering the universal youth work offer.

The governance arrangements overseeing planning and delivery of the universal youth work offer are also unique, having also contributed to the impact of the Partnership's work across Perth & Kinross. Considerable autonomy is afforded to each partner agency, affording them the flexibility to shape their delivery in response to the unique circumstances prevailing in their communities. Partners have thus been able to develop relationships with key stakeholders locally, ensuring that the community is supportive of the offer and that the PKUYWP-funded provision aligns with local services. These same partners come together to frame the direction of travel of the Partnership, reflecting a commitment to bottom-up, community-led decision-making absent from traditional local authority run provision.

## Drivers Shaping the Partnership's Work

Provision in every setting is driven by a clear commitment to providing young people with access to high quality youth work and – through this – to enhancing their life chances and longer term outcomes. Youth work is based on recognition of the value of the process, and that if practice adheres to the basic tenets of quality provision – building effective, purposive relationships with young people, based on respect, trust and mutual positive regard; starting where the young person is at; engaging in constructive and creative conversations; and working towards agreed goals – then positive outcomes are sure to follow. The Partnership is clearly committed to process-led provision, as evidenced by the fact that – throughout this evaluation – I have encountered practitioners able to demonstrate their commitment to excellent provision, from which the young people accessing the PKUYWP-funded offer have clearly benefitted in myriad ways.

The evaluation's findings reveal further drivers to the effective and impactful delivery of the universal youth work offer, common to practice in all of the localities. These are addressed in more detail in the discussion on youth impact, below, and include: the provision of a dedicated safe space, over which young people have a sense of ownership; a commitment to inclusive and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that the offer is seen as being for all young people in the locality and that all are made to feel welcome when attending; recognition of the importance of youth voice, so that young people have opportunities to engage in decision-making about issues that affect or are of concern to them; and the sustaining by practitioners of nurturing relationships based on trust, respect and concern for the wellbeing of every young person.

The calibre of the practitioners and volunteers delivering universal youth work is central to the success of the offer, and I have been particularly impressed by their professionalism and the way in which they have driven the Partnership's agenda in each of the communities. I have observed practitioners in different contexts, working together at strategic level as well as engaging with young people in their own settings while I have been out 'in the field'. They have demonstrated in all these interactions a variety of skills necessary to sustain effective person-centred practice; as well as recognising in discussions with me the need for further self-development in order to enhance their skills and their practice.

The contribution of the two lead officers to the successful operation of the Partnership cannot be overstated. This key relationship is sustained by a shared vision and their understanding of the importance of allowing the process to be embedded in each setting. I have encountered many failed partnerships, where the reason for their failure has been an inability on the part of key individuals to work together towards a shared vision; and an unwillingness to trust in the capabilities of delivery partners. This is not the case in the PKUYWP, where – instead – mutual respect feeds trust and confidence in practitioners to concentrate on the delivery of high quality, impactful youth work.

## Impact

One of the basic premises of universal youth work is that its impact on a young person can take years to take effect. Nevertheless, this evaluation has collated evidence of individual

and group impacts that are themselves impressive, and offer hope for further impacts to unfold with time.

### *Young People*

The funding provided by the PUYWP in support of youth work provision in seven communities across Perth & Kinross has ensured access to community-based youth work for large numbers of young people who would otherwise have been deprived of these opportunities. Data on numbers engaging with the different elements of provision supported by the Partnership are provided by partner agencies to the Council and Gannochy Trust on a quarterly basis; consideration of these has been outwith the remit of this evaluation, but engagement rates have exceeded expectations in all settings.

For many young people, access to a dedicated space that provides them with an environment in which they can feel safe to explore their identity and to be themselves, free of externally-generated pressures and expectations. For others, having somewhere to go to escape the pressures of family life, or/and to decompress after the challenges of the school day is valued. The contribution that access to this kind of safe space can make to young people's mental health and wellbeing cannot be overstated<sup>42</sup>, and it is encouraging to see the Partnership funding being used to support this important element of provision. An added bonus arising from the provision of dedicated space relates to the sense of value that young people feel, their ability to take ownership of and become involved in the management of the spaces, developing a range of skills (finances, project planning and management, collaboration and negotiation, etc.).

The universal youth work offer has provided young people from all localities with myriad opportunities to find 'something to do' in a range of settings across the five localities, including: drop-in sessions; group discussions; small group activities (including music, arts, leisure, etc. groups); awards-based work; volunteering; community action; and *ad hoc* activities framed around the young people's interests. Young people appreciate the range of activities on offer, and generally take part in more than one, demonstrating that they value being part of and active in the groups.

One of the most consistent messages resonating in discussions with young people is that they cherish having 'somebody to talk to', and that they derive considerable value from the relationships they develop with practitioners. Youth Workers and volunteers demonstrate considerable skill in their approach to establishing and sustaining relationships, which are used to facilitate dialogue with young people, and to provide information, advice and guidance if and when required. For young people, these may not be required; simply being able to talk through their concerns or to hear a different perspective on them is enough. Either way, by being accessible and non-judgemental, practitioners have been available to deliver nurturing and constructive interventions to many young people in a manner that feels like the embodiment of care to the young people they support.

Young people engaging with the universal youth work offer have been able to develop a range of 'soft skills that improve their life chances'. Both practitioners and young people

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<sup>42</sup> YMCA (2020b).

themselves highlighted personal traits – such as confidence, self-esteem and social skills – recognising that access to time and space in which to develop friendships and relationships with practitioners has contributed to these significantly; particularly given the negative impact of the covid-19 pandemic on young people's ability to socialise. Other development ascribed to their participation in Partnership-funded activities include communication skills and teamwork, which have arisen primarily through group work and volunteering opportunities. It is worth noting that engagement with youth work has also been seen to engender excitement and optimism (again, much needed after covid-19) as well as raising young people's aspirations, something related to being exposed to opportunities and dialogue about possibilities.

Engagement in informal curricular activities, awards programmes and volunteering at the settings has helped young people to develop 'hard skills', for which many have gained different forms of accreditation. Examples include numeracy and literacy skills (especially for young people who have disengaged from their studies in formal settings); practical skills around managing funds and being responsible for cash; organisational administration and governance (through planning, preparing, delivering and evaluating activities as well as sitting on management committees and forums); and catering and hygiene skills (from running food services and attending training).

Young people have accessed 'opportunities for developing and testing leadership and decision-making skills' which would not otherwise have existed. The universal youth work offer is delivered in such a way that young people are encouraged to take on responsibilities as soon as they are able, and for the amount and level of responsibilities to be increased throughout their time engaging with the provision. Ranging from the meet-and-greet role to participating as full members of management committees, opportunities are available to meet the interests and capabilities of all young people who attend. Practitioners use their relationships with young people to informally assess their interest in and capacity for the many roles, and provide encouragement and support to help each young person develop within their adopted role. This respects the need for Youth Workers to start where young people are at, and to agree actions with them through a process based on dialogue.

The universal youth work offer has successfully complemented the formal curriculum provided by schools across Perth & Kinross to improve young people's 'access to accreditation of non-formal learning'. In the same spirit of negotiating their path through engagement with the youth work offer, young people are encouraged to take advantage of a range of opportunities (including working towards attainment of Saltire, John Muir, Youth Scotland, DofE, High Five, and Dynamic Youth Awards; and pursuing alternative academic qualifications). Often, the delivery of these options is limited to the Partnership-funded settings, and young people would not have the same access to them without the PKUYWP.

Every setting supported by the Partnership has enhanced young people's voice, both in shaping the activities with which they choose to engage and in contributing towards decisions about services in the wider community. All young people have the opportunity to take part in structured *Youth Voice* groups, and those who do become involved in debate and decision-making across a wide range of issues. The Partnership-funded agencies have supported young people's participation in a variety of local and district-wide consultations,

and have empowered young people to present their views proactively to local, regional and national bodies and representatives (including Community Councils, PKC, Perth & Kinross Voice Forum, MSPs, SCVO's *Gathering*, etc.).

### *Youth Organisations*

While it is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty the extent to which the 'security and sustainability with core and programme support' has been enhanced by the partner agencies' participation in the PKUYWP, it is possible to say that considerable synergy has been achieved between the universal youth work offer and their other services. Young people accessing one area of provision have in many instances been able to transition to other services, meaning that providers can ensure a better quality of experience for each young person through a more tailored approach. It seems likely that future work on funding and collaboration beyond the current Partnership funding round will focus on the sustainability of partner agencies' core offer, including universal youth work.

All partner agencies have spent 'less time on applications and reporting with Gannochy Trust and Perth and Kinross Council' because of their participation in the Partnership. Having funding guaranteed for their universal youth work offer in advance, based on one bid at the start of the funding cycle, has meant that partner agencies have not had to worry about preparing bids for funding for this work repeatedly. An additional benefit arising from this is the fact that partner agencies have been able to offer greater security to their staff, which has translated in most cases to very little staff turnover, in turn providing young people with greater continuity and consistency.

Practitioners from all the partner agencies participate in regular formal meetings to facilitate the sharing of 'knowledge, expertise and resources'. These formal sessions are complemented by ongoing informal networking and information sharing. It is apparent that one agency has taken the lead in pulling together joint funding bids, something that would not have happened without the Partnership, as these organisations were previously in competition for funding. This collaboration is something to build on.

The PKUYW partnership approach has enhanced partner agencies' voice through their participation in 'an authority-wide collective'. The effectiveness of this arrangement – ensuring a higher profile for partner agencies in decision-making processes – has come from the establishment and sustaining of trusting relationships and shared vision between all parties, a critical factor often missing from less successful partnerships.

One aspect not fully explored under the auspices of this evaluation was the extent to which the Partnership and its constituent members engage in dialogue or/and collaborate with other organisations delivering youth work throughout Perth & Kinross. It is apparent that the seven delivery partners are not the only players in this field of practice, and it would be useful to understand the full picture of provision, and how the PKUYWP-funded programmes and activities complement and enhance other provision. Given that this evaluation has identified benefits arising from the collaboration between partner agencies, it seems likely that there is scope for some of these benefits to be cascaded to the wider youth work sector in Perth & Kinross.

## Recommendations

It is not for me to make judgement on whether or not the funding arrangements for the universal youth work offer should continue in their current form; that is for the partners to determine after consideration of this report alongside the data they hold on attendance and engagement. Moreover, agreement has been reached recently to extend the arrangement for a further five years, obviating the need for this report to include such a recommendation. Nevertheless, I feel confident in asserting that – should they be in a position to extend the agreement further into the future – the funding partners would reap the benefits of their investment as the universal youth work offer they support extends its reach and impact across generations.

This view is shared<sup>43</sup> by the Chief Executive of YouthLink Scotland in their reflection on the partnership:

“Collaboration between partners has never been more important as we seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people. Perth and Kinross’s Strategic Youth Partnership supported by Perth and Kinross Council and the Gannochy Trust is a great example of this, and I have no doubt that continued funding will lead to even better outcomes in the years ahead.”

The following recommendations are made by way of encouragement to all stakeholders in the Perth & Kinross Universal Youth Work Partnership to celebrate their achievements in delivering an excellent service to the young people from all localities, and to build on good practice detailed in this report.

- (i) Involve young people in the planning and execution of a celebratory event, demonstrating the impact of the universal youth work offer on their personal development and life chances. This could bring together young people engaged in activities at all settings, and connect them with influencers and decision-makers, further developing their voice, confidence and communication skills. Perhaps this could be an annual event ...
- (ii) Facilitate more formal cross-setting training and development opportunities, for both practitioners and young people. Practitioners and settings might benefit from attainment of quality standards for provision, the development of fundraising and management skills, or/and professional qualifications. Young people, similarly, might gain skills and accreditation, as well as broadening their network and sphere of influence.
- (iii) Create pathways from volunteering onto apprenticeships and other relevant courses – including accredited youth work provision at College and University level – for young people and adult volunteers. This would benefit individuals wishing to pursue a career in youth work as well as contributing towards the medium- to long-term sustainability of provision.
- (iv) Devise a future funding strategy to ensure the longer-term sustainability of partner agencies and universal youth work provision. This might include

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<sup>43</sup> Perth Gazette, 31 August 2021.

coordination of funding bids to external bodies (including government agencies, charitable trusts and national lottery distributors) in anticipation of a reduction or withdrawal in funding from PKC and GT at the end of the current funding period.

- (v) Explore the potential for extending the reach of the Partnership's influence into the wider youth work sector, formalising links with other providers across Perth & Kinross. This could be at both local and area-wide levels, allowing for: sharing good practice; supporting non-PKUYW-funded provision; collaboration on funding bids to sustain and extend provision; developing shared quality standards to enhance provision; and operationalising training and other CPD pathways across the sector.
- (vi) Review the role of the core (funding) partners to broaden their influence on provision from their current activities. As well as monitoring progress of the partner agencies against contractual obligations, GT and PKC could enhance the delivery of programmes and activities in each of the localities through the provision of formalised professional support and supervision to staff and volunteers. The value of the contribution of partner agency trustees and other volunteers who currently oversee provision in the localities cannot be overstated. However, these committed and dedicated individuals are not necessarily professionally qualified or experienced, and some form of structured support for staff and volunteers from the core partners would contribute to enhanced quality of provision.

## Personal Reflection

As with my work on previous similar evaluations, it has been a privilege to meet such dedicated professionals and volunteers, committed to delivering an excellent service to young people in their communities. Having worked with young people for many years myself, I understand the emotional toll that this kind of relational practice can take, and that – while the rewards are myriad – it can be exhausting, especially when undertaken in the community where you live. I have met and been inspired during the course of this inquiry by colleagues who thrive on the challenges of their chosen profession, and whose energy is fuelled by and fuels the successes of the young people in their care.

It is a joy, too, to meet young people, and to be permitted access to their hopes and dreams as well as to share in an honest conversation about their fears. For so many young people from across the Perth & Kinross area to feel comfortable talking with me, a complete stranger, is a further privilege, and itself demonstrates the impact of the trust they have in their Youth Workers, on whose recommendation they agreed to talk to me.

Finally, having witnessed the decimation of universal youth work provision in the communities in which I have worked across the UK over the past thirty years, and across the sector as a whole, it has been an unexpected delight to encounter a flourishing initiative such as this. I commend all those volunteers, practitioners, managers and decision-makers (specifically PKC Councillors and GT Trustees) for having the courage of their convictions and committing to this unique and inspirational Partnership.

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## Appendix 1a: Perth & Kinross Local Authority Area



## Appendix 1b: Perth & Kinross Communities

Kinross-shire, Almond & Earn	Strathearn & Strathallan	Perth City	Highland & Strathtay	East	
				Angus Border	Perth-Dundee Corridor
<b>Bridge of Earn</b>	<b>Auchterarder</b>	<b>Perth</b>	<b>Aberfeldy</b>	<b>Alyth</b>	<b>Errol (Perth)</b>
Abernethy	Aberuthven	Almondbank	Acharn	Meigle	Leetown
Forgandenny	Blackford	Bankfoot	Bridge of Balgie		St Madoes
Forteviot	Dunning	Bridgend	Dull	<b>Blairgowrie</b>	
Pitkeathly Wells	Strathearn	Kinrossie	Fearnan	Burrelton	<b>Invergowrie (Dundee)</b>
		Luncarty	Fortingall	Clunie	Fowlis Wester
<b>Glenfarg</b>	<b>Crieff</b>	Methven	Grandtully	Coupar Angus	Inchture
Abbots Deuglie	Innerpeffray	Scone	Kenmore	Meikleour	Longforgan
	Madderty	Stormontfield	Strathtay	Rattray	Kingoodie
<b>Kinross</b>	Muthill		Weem		Pitmiddle
Balado				<b>Kirkmichael</b>	
Milnathort	<b>Comrie</b>		<b>Blair Atholl</b>	Finegand	
	Lawers		Killiecrankie	Kindrogan	
	St Fillans				
			<b>Dunkeld</b>	Spittal of Glenshee	
	<b>(Dunblane)</b>		Amulree		
	Greenloaning		Birnam		
			Waterloo		
			<b>Kinloch Rannoch</b>		
			Rannoch Station		
			<b>Pitlochry</b>		
			Ballinluig		
			Logierait		
			Moulin		
			Trinafour		

## Appendix 2: Support for Children, Young People and Families

[Children and young people affected by disabilities](#): support for babies, children and young people with complex needs.

[REACH - Intensive Support to Young People and Families](#): a multi-disciplinary team providing intensive support to families with multiple complex needs, where there is a significant likelihood of the young person (aged 12-18) becoming accommodated away from home.

[CREST](#): a team of independent Family Group Decision Making and Lifelong Links Co-ordinators; works in partnership with families and the professionals who support them, promoting an innovative way of working that is inclusive, rights based and future focused.

[Getting It Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#): a way of working which focuses on improving outcomes for all children by placing the child at the centre of thinking, planning and action; relevant for every service that impacts on children; starts in the universal services of health and education, focusing on early intervention to provide the right help at the right time.

[Services for young people](#): services for young people will work with and support young people aged between 12 and 25 and their families [to resolve concerns](#) at home, school and community. Services – consisting of Youth Work and Throughcare / Aftercare – work across all localities, schools and in the central facility @Scott Street.

[Educational Psychology services](#): promoting the psychological wellbeing of children and young people. The primary focus is on overcoming barriers to learning, with interventions to promote learning, development, resilience and wellbeing

[Activity agreements](#): an integral part of work around youth employability / the Youth Employment Action Plan, which aims to help all young people to fulfil their potential by developing the essential skills for life, learning and work, thereby improving outcomes for learners and employers alike. These are targeted at young people (aged 16-19) who are currently not in education, employment or training.

[The Duke of Edinburgh's Award](#): aims to inspire guide and support young people in their self-development and recognise their individual achievements. This is facilitated through enjoyable, challenging and rewarding programmes of personal development which are of the highest quality and the widest reach.

[Parenting and family learning](#): offers a variety of friendly groups and services for parents and carers, helping to build positive relationships, including: strengthening families programme; parenting bite-sized sessions; the Solihull approach; and the Teen Triple P programme.

[Self-Directed Support](#): is about working with young people and their families to develop a personalised support plan for the future. This approach to social care provides more choice, flexibility and control over how support is provided, and allows people to live an independent and fulfilling life in their local community.

[Children's Panel](#): a central element of the Children's Hearing System, Scotland's unique care and justice system for children and young people in need of care, protection and support.

Other relevant initiatives:

**@ScottStreet** hosts services offering guidance, support, information and signposting for young people. Subjects covered include health, alcohol, drugs, housing, education, benefits and employment. Resource base for Youth Workers and issue-based youth groups.

Developing the Young Workforce Perth and Kinross ([DYWPK](#)) is a partnership between employers and education to help boost youth employment, improve our skills base and help our region grow.

Perth & Kinross Employment Network ([PKNET](#)) is a partner in delivering the Activity Agreements element of the YEAP.

[PKAVS](#) is a charity promoting the wellbeing of people and communities throughout Perth & Kinross, at the times when they need it most. They support unpaid carers, those recovering from mental ill-health, minority communities, older people, the local Third Sector, and volunteers.

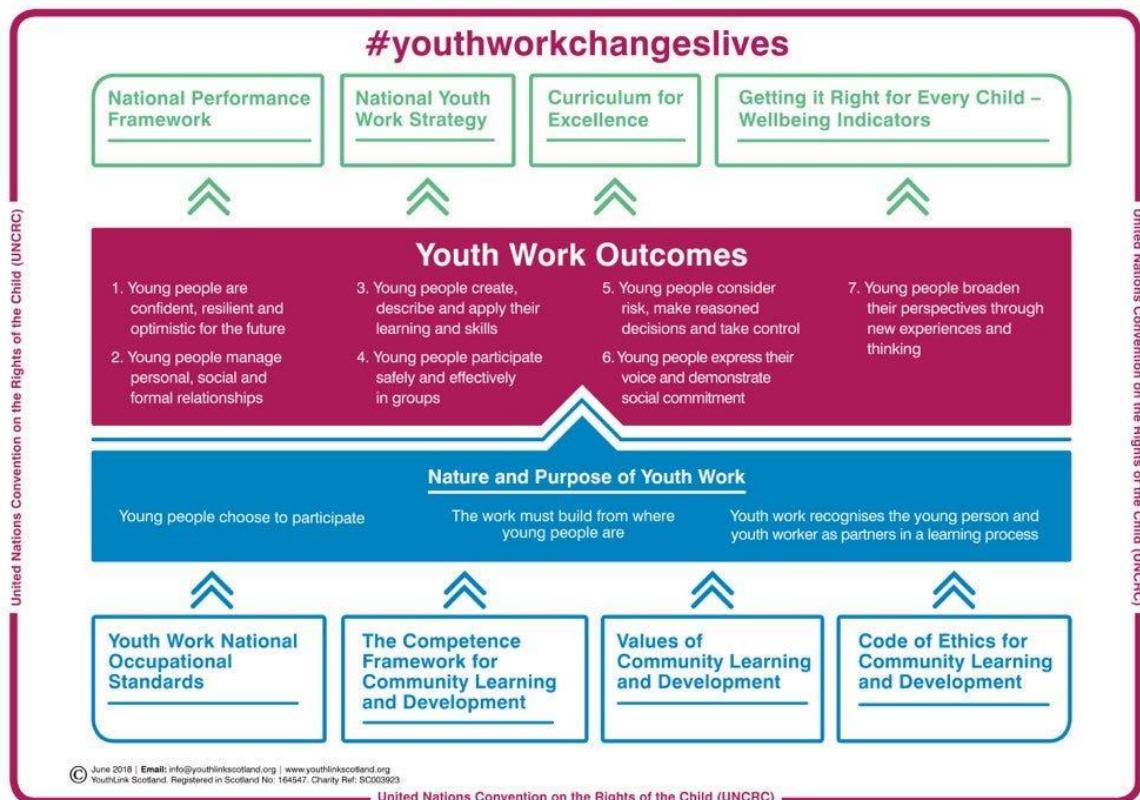
[YMCA](#) Tayside aims to empower young people (aged 8-25), mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds (including those who require early intervention, those who are underachieving, those who have addiction issues, offenders and those who have become homeless). Support to young people to “take their next step” includes: providing a safe space to grow and develop; offering employability programmes to help build a positive future; and meeting / supporting young people in their own communities.

[Lifelink](#) is a social enterprise providing wellbeing and counselling services that support young people to make positive changes in their lives, realise their own abilities to cope with stress and develop ways of overcoming mental illnesses (incl. anxiety and depression).

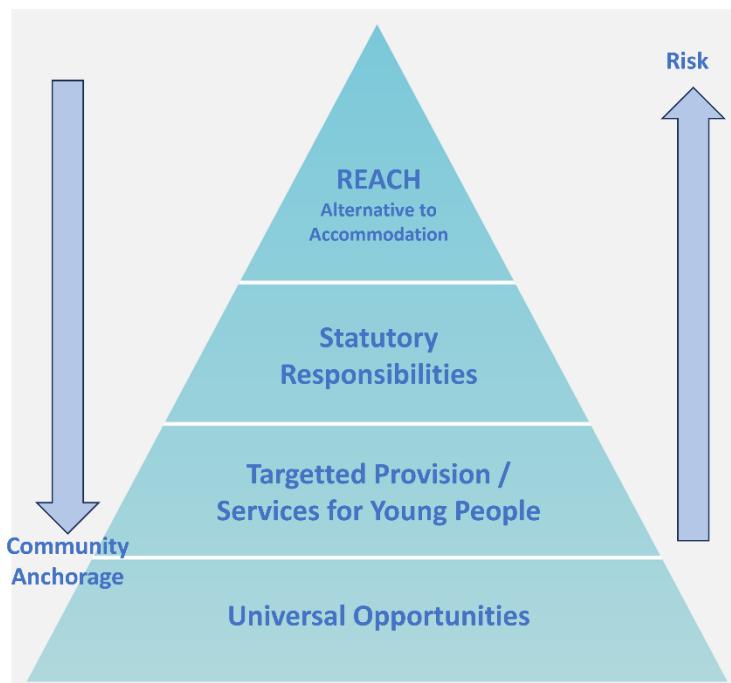
Kinross-shire Youth Services ([KYS](#)) develop and sustain educational, fun, social activities and opportunities for young people aged 11-25 years old throughout Kinross-shire. This can include youth achievement awards, John Muir awards, Duke of Edinburgh award, football, S1 night, school groups, interest groups, detached youth work, holiday activities and much more.

Run by a partnership between greenspace Scotland and Youth Scotland, the [Young Placechangers](#) programme helps young people (12-18 years old) to take the lead in changing the places where they live. The programme is aiming to develop a focus on involving young people in climate action and local climate action plans, and thinking about place through the lens and perspective of young women and girls.

## Appendix 3a: Scottish Youth Work Policy Environment



## Appendix 3b: The PKUYWP Vision for Youth Work Provision



## Appendix 4: Relationships, Care, Nurture & Love

The importance of relationships as the core of effective youth work practice – and the centrality of care and love within these relationships – was evident throughout all these discussions, with one respondent typically stating that they take “every opportunity to spend time and build those relationships” (AL).

Relationships were characterised as a means of “getting to know and *get alongside* young people ... responding to their interests rather than trying to force them into things” (LG, emphasis added). This “meeting them where they’re at” means that young people “come to us ... they want to engage with us ... once we’ve got to that point it’s about building a relationship, *getting alongside*, supporting and encouraging them ...” (AL). In this way, care seems to have been conceived as inclusion by practitioners, with one suggesting that “every young person has to feel welcome here whatever their identity, sexuality, beliefs, creed, whatever”. One respondent went further than this, suggesting that “for many of our young people, their families don’t respond to their excitements and challenges ... many are lacking love ... this is something we have to somehow redress”. This was exemplified in one example where one young person in danger of being sent to prison told their Youth Worker “you’re the only person that’s still there for me”.

These discussions foregrounded practitioners’ intrinsic motivation for care to feature at the heart of these relationships, with one asserting that “I think you don’t open your doors if you don’t care ... we have a will to make a positive difference in other people’s lives in the community”. Reciprocity featured in some of the discussions, too, with the same respondent acknowledging that the motivation deepened as the positive difference also impacts in their own life: “maybe some of the reason we do it because it makes us feel good”. There was evidence that care for others growing within groups, with one respondent suggesting that the young people in their group have come together after initially struggling with in-person interaction post-covid: “there is a lot of patience in there as well ... the kids were able to accommodate one young person’s challenging behaviour by demonstrating patience, kindness and friendship”.

Several respondents used the term ‘nurture’ unprompted in their discussions, one typically characterising nurture as “encouragement ... consistency ... they know we’re there when they need us, whether they attend or not” (LG). Another suggested that the fact that they feel nurtured and valued is “one of the main reasons young people choose to come here”, clarifying how “they then choose how much of their lives they want to share with you”. Another respondent clarified how nurture is not all uncritical in its application:

“I would say we are very nurturing. Lots of our young people have been here for years during which time they’ve had lots of ups and downs. We will still challenge them if we think their decisions are risky ... we might nudge them to make better decisions, but give them the freedom to make their own decisions, and help them identify next steps if they get it wrong”.

There were many stories of young people returning to visit settings long after leaving ... “just to keep you up to date on what’s happening in their lives, to let us know how ‘things’ that we supported them with have turned out for them in the long run”. This kind of process reiterates the reciprocal nature of the relationship, demonstrating that young people want their Youth Workers to see their completed story. One respondent acknowledged that nurture-in-practice can present challenges, acknowledging that “professional lines need to be considered and boundaries managed ... we’re not *loco parentis*, and it’s the parent’s job to nurture”.

These formulations of youth work practice suggest that practitioners go beyond their legalistic 'duty of care' in their relational practice. One respondent conceptualised caring for young people as part of their organisation's "ethical platform", asserting that "all of the stuff we do has to come from a place of care, particularly because the young people are so varied", adding "it would be naïve to suggest there would not be some negative influences in our provision, so we need to be able to look out for them all in a caring way". This position was exemplified in the case of an evolving relationship between two attendees, where staff had concerns about whether or not it was age appropriate (there was a seven year age gap between them). Taking into account the additional needs of the older young person, these concerns were allayed, but arrangements were put in place to ensure the safety of the younger person with external partners where staff knew the young people met.

The language of love and care infused these discussions, with respondents highlighting their willingness to use this kind of language in their interactions with the young people. Put simply, one respondent noted "We love them. I have said that word a lot, so they know we care. Sometimes that's the only word to be used". Another expanded:

"We always use that kind of language. It comes from the idea that for some of these young people, we are a second family, and these are elements of family life, with professional boundaries of course. It is important for us that they know and feel that we like them and value them and like spending time with them ... that they know we care for them and want to keep them safe" (AL).

There was acknowledgement in these discussions that these words can be interpreted in different ways, as they have different meanings, and that it is sometimes necessary to be clear about the intent behind their use. One respondent was concerned that "We use words like care and love and nurture, but not everyone knows what they mean", adding "with love, people make the presumption too often that love is sex, that intimate eros in a sexualised society is the first thing that people think of ... so we sometimes need to define meanings for love and nurture". Another recognised that "love can mean a variety of different things in different situations, but fundamentally young people wouldn't feel as nurtured if love wasn't somewhere in the background". The reciprocal benefit of the articulation of love was flagged up here, in that this respondent detailed how (not untypically) "we are a fast-paced workplace, with potential for burnout" suggesting that "love is required to sustain our very low staff turnover".

These discussions foreground different aspects of the ethic of care being enacted in and infusing all areas of youth work practice. It is evident from these discussions that practitioners see care as exceeding the honouring of a duty and being much more about inclusion, reciprocity, nurture and love. It is encouraging to see practitioners being comfortable talking openly about their motivations and enactment of the ethic of care, and that they articulate these concepts in their relationships with young people. As one respondent observed, Youth Workers do not have "the monopoly on care, nurture and love", but their embodiment strengthens their informal and non-formal relationships with young people, contributing towards the outcomes associated with their field.

## Appendix 5a: Discussion Guide (Practitioners)

### 1. Provision

Brief overview of your organisation's entire youth work 'offer'

Details of your PKUYWP 'offer'

How does this compare to pre-PKUYWP? ... drop-ins emerged as we got access to premises

What other sources of funding are accessed to support youth work provision? Any of these for universal youth work 'offer'?

What is the PKUYWP contribution as a proportion of overall funding?

How has being part of this partnership impacted on your ability to access other funding?

### 2. Participation

Comments on the young people engaged in PKUYWP-funded activities:

- Numbers
- Demographics
- Socio-economic backgrounds
- Geography
- etc.

How does this compare to pre-PKUYWP?

What is the impact of PKUYWP funded activities on participation in other youth work provision?

### 3. Impact on Young People

What do you consider to be the benefits of universal youth work provision?

How do you capture the impact of the PKUYWP-funded provision?

What frameworks do you refer to in planning your evaluation of impact?

What does your monitoring and evaluation tell you about your impact on young people who attend this provision?

Comment on the following specific aspects:

- 'soft' and 'hard' skills to improve young people's life chances
- leadership and decision-making skills
- accredited non-formal learning
- ties in with voice and committees ... Dynamic Youth awards, Saltire awards, etc.
- youth voice (activities | provision | organisation | wider)

#### **4. Partnership Working**

How would you characterise the culture of the PKUYWP?

How are the characteristics of successful partnership working sustained within PKUYWP?

Please identify examples of collaborative advantage in the delivery of youth work across P&K

In what ways might the partnership have impeded delivery?

How has the partnership approach benefitted your organisation?

How has the partnership impacted on the wider youth work agenda in P&K and Scotland?

#### **5. Some Additional Aspects**

How does government policy guide and shape your practice?

What are your thoughts on the relational aspects of youth work, specifically the importance of:

- The practitioner's ethic of care towards young people
- The importance of 'nurture' as an element of practice
- The role of 'professional love' in work with young people

AOCB

## Appendix 5b: Discussion Groups (Young People)

### Discussion Prompts

The discussion groups were run in a very informal manner, to help young people feel comfortable about taking part in free-flowing conversations, especially given the need to avoid following lines of inquiry that might expose them to revealing personal issues. The following questions are drawn from one of the discussion recordings, to provide an indication of the approaches taken to capturing the young people's perspectives;

- Why do you come?
- What do you come to do?
- How did you hear about it?
- What did it feel like the first time you came through the door?
- How does this compare to school?
- Talk to me about the people who work here
- How are they different to your experience of other adults?
- If this didn't exist, where would you go for the kind of support you described?
- What do you get out of coming here? Has it made an impact in any way?
- If it wasn't for (insert KYTHE, LOGOS, etc.) ... ???
- What would you like to say to the funders to try and persuade them to continue funding this work?

### Impact Activity

Young people were asked to put a coloured dot alongside all of the potential impacts listed below (drawn from PKUYWP documentation) that applied to them (i.e. which impacts they felt they would attribute to their attendance at the UYW provision); and then to identify the **one** that they felt applied the most in their case.

- Developing Strength and Wellbeing
- Addressing issues around Identity and Resilience
- Meeting your Developmental Needs
- Building Confident & Self-Esteem
- Engaging in Community Activities
- Accessing a Safe Space to participate in group and other activities
- Taking part in accredited Awards
- Managing Risk

## Appendix 5c: Participant Information Sheet

Information contained in this document was shared with participants prior to the start of all interviews and focus group discussions. It was important to ensure that all participants were fully aware of the way in which their contributions would be used so that they were able to give their informed consent to participating in the enquiry.

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### Perth & Kinross Universal Youth Work Partnership Evaluation Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a study about youth work provision in Perth & Kinross. Before you decide whether or not you would like to participate, it is important that you read the information provided below. This will help you to understand why and how the study is being carried out and what participation will involve. Please let the researcher who gave you this information know if anything is unclear, or if you have any questions.

#### **Who is conducting the study?**

This study is being conducted by Martin Purcell ([mpurcell001@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:mpurcell001@dundee.ac.uk)), as part of an ongoing evaluation by Perth & Kinross Council and the Gannochy Trust into youth work services provided under a partnership arrangement between these two organisations.

The study is being overseen by Brian Hutton (Services for Young People Improvement Manager at Perth & Kinross Council) and Steven Greig (Development Manager at the Gannochy Trust).

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The evaluation aims to generate a deeper understanding of the impacts of the partnership arrangements, focussing in particular on:

- (i) the unique contribution made by the partnership;
- (ii) what shaped the partnership's work; and
- (iii) the impacts the universal youth work offer supported by the partnership.

#### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You have been invited to take part because you will be able to talk about your experience as:

- A young person attending youth work provision; or/and
- A paid or volunteer practitioner involved in delivering youth work.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No. Taking part in this study is voluntary. Choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way, and will not affect access to services, groups or support. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without explanation and without penalty. This can be done by contacting Martin Purcell. If you decide to leave the study, any data arising from your participation will – if possible (i.e. if it remains identifiable by the researcher) – be destroyed. It may not be possible to delete data that has already been anonymised.

## **What will happen if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to participate in one of the following:

- One semi-structured interview conducted by Martin Purcell at a time and place that suits you. This may be in person (at your youth work venue) or over Teams, depending on your preference and availability. The interview will last for no more than 45 minutes, and will be recorded (either with an audio recorder or via Microsoft Teams).

or/and

- One focus group, which will be facilitated by Martin Purcell at a time and place that suits the majority of participants. This activity will include you and a small number of other people, and will last for approximately 45 minutes. The discussion will be recorded with an audio recorder and written notes of the discussion.

## **Are there any risks in taking part?**

We have not identified any known risks to participating in the study. However, there is always scope for people to become upset when reflecting on and discussing difficult circumstances that might arise in these activities. Participants will be monitored throughout their engagement with this study to ensure that any such upset is minimised, and any activities in which any participant becomes upset will be stopped. In such cases, individuals will be signposted to support. The study will also be conducted in line with the Perth & Kinross Protecting People Policy and Procedures to ensure all participants' safety.

## **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

This study will be used to help local agencies in Perth & Kinross improve their work in supporting young people, and it will also be shared with any relevant national organisations to influence national policy developments across Scotland for young people and youth provision. We will keep all participants notified about all feedback received on the study and its impact.

Participation in the group activities will enable you to meet, reflect and learn from other young people, volunteers and professionals across Perth & Kinross, and take part in engaging activities.

## **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All information shared during this study will be treated in confidence, meaning that we will:

- Create and maintain the trust and confidence of participants;
- Protect people; and
- Be accountable for the quality of our work.

Only the lead researcher will have access to personal information collected about participants, and all data will be anonymised prior to analysis. However, if we feel that a person is at risk of harm, we will pass on all details to the relevant authorities straightaway to ensure their safety.

**What will happen to the information I provide?**

The information and views shared by participants in this study will be brought together and analysed to help generate a picture of the overall impact of the youth work supported by the partnership between Perth & Kinross Council and the Gannochy Trust. The findings will be written up into a range of outputs, including a report to the partnership board which will be used to inform discussions about the future of youth work provision in Perth & Kinross. Other reports may be produced, to help share the findings with a wider audience, including other practitioners, policy makers and academics.

During this study, we will:

- Record only the relevant information that is needed to conduct the study.
- Store information about you safely and privately. Information is held either in locked filing cabinets or on a password protected document on a secure One Drive.
- Destroy information held about you after the end of the study.

**Data Protection**

Perth & Kinross Council is the data controller for the personal data processed in this study.  
NB No personal data will be collected or processed in this study.

**Contact**

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact Martin Purcell:  
[mpurcell001@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:mpurcell001@dundee.ac.uk).

**Is there someone else I can complain to?**

If you wish to complain about the way the study has been conducted, please contact Brian Hutton ([BDHutton@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:BDHutton@pkc.gov.uk)) or Steven Greig ([Steven.Greig@gannochytrust.org.uk](mailto:Steven.Greig@gannochytrust.org.uk)).

**Alternative formats**

A copy of this Information Sheet can be made available in alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille) on request.