



Street – Based Youth Work

Derbyshire Youth Service



Derbyshire Youth Service would like to acknowledge that the Street Based Youth Work policy was originally written by Wiltshire County Council Youth Service. We have adapted the policy to meet the needs of Derbyshire Young People

1. Introduction

This document has been written to promote and guide the development of street based youth work throughout the service, as part and parcel of its mainstream delivery to young people in the 11-19 age range. This includes projects that may be part-funded from external sources (e.g. the Community Safety Partnership)

Street-based youth work (SBYW) is the term used to describe youth work when it is carried out with young people on the streets or in other public spaces. Its core purpose, principles and values remain the same as for youth work in any other setting (as described in the Service's Curriculum Framework); although in practice, some aspects may require additional time and negotiation (e.g. establishing contact and boundaries)

It follows, therefore, that SBYW is primarily about engaging young people in the programmes of informal educational activity – designed with them to promote their personal and social development. As with youth work in any other setting, these programmes should be:

- Needs led
- Participative
- Developmental
- Empowering
- Inclusive
- Planned
- Reflective & Evaluated

In line with this, it is important to recognise that although this approach offers a means of engaging those groups who may be more 'at risk' or 'harder-to-reach' it is never the less professionally unacceptable to simply view street-based youth work as a tactical response to concerns about crime or community safety. To do so risks:-

- Confusing the remit of youth work with the role of enforcement;
- Marginalizing the work's primary purpose (which is to educate and empower); and
- Colluding with the stereotype that portrays young people less worthy than adults by over associating 'youth' with 'crime'.

The concept of youth work is based on encouraging and facilitating young people's voluntary involvement in developmental processes. Although this has clear preventive and divisionary value, it remains distinct from concepts of control or enforcement – which are by nature, none negotiated. In practice, this means workers who are being expected to go out and get alongside 'at-risk' groups whose behaviour may be problematic; should not then find themselves being held to account for this behaviour – as if implicated by association – and/or responsible for policing it – which is a necessary but different role.

When street-based youth work is developed in conjunction with centre-based youth work, young people stand to benefit from a far more comprehensive and flexible service than could ever be achieved through one or other of these types of work alone. However, much relies on staff sharing a common understanding of related concepts, professional practices and strategy.

In order to establish this – and to provide a source of easy ongoing reference – the document has been divided into a number of distinct sections and sub sections, as set out on the previous content page. As such, it represents the organisations continued commitment to developing and evolving its practices, in line with: the government's Transforming Youth Work agenda; the five outcomes in every child matters; and staff's own aspirations to reach out to increasing numbers of young people within the localities they serve.

2. Clarifying Concepts

It helps if everybody has a common understanding of related terms and concepts.

‘Street-based youth work’

An umbrella term for work with young people in public settings (includes mobile, outreach and detached)

‘Mobile work’

Using a converted bus/lorry/trailer as a focal point for contact and delivery in public settings. Typically these vehicles offer informal space designed for group discussion; access to information and selective use of activities etc. Often they are used to reach young people living in isolated rural areas, although they also have use in urban settings, (e.g. on estate where there is no provision) and/or at high profile events (e.g. festivals and fun days). They are often decorated to attract. Their purpose can be targeted at specific age ranges (youth information bus, climbing wall, arts bus etc) and/or themed to focus on specific curriculum areas (e.g. arts or drug work)

‘Outreach work’

1. Working in the catchment of a youth centre to:
 - Promote and negotiate its use – by new or existing groups
 - Maintain a professional overview of the local ‘youth scene’ (to assess and prioritise need)
 2. Taking the services of a specialist agency or project out to young people who would or could not come in to use it (e.g. Drugs, Arts or Health Projects)
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‘Detached work’

A planned and committed approach to engaging young people in developmental projects and programmes – initiated, sustained and informed by ongoing contact on the streets. Among other things, this approach is characterised by its:

- Flexibility to assess and target groups most in need or at risk
- Capacity to develop a response independent of other provision (if necessary)
- Ability to provide young people with a ‘stepping stone’ to other services

‘Centre-based work’

An umbrella term for the use and development of buildings as a resource and focus for programmes of youth work – including as a ‘base’ for street-based youth work. (youth centres; community centres, village halls etc)

3. The value of street-based youth work – its changing and function

Street-based youth work (SBYW) – in all its various forms – has been around for many decades. Throughout the 70s and 80s, youth workers that worked with young people on the streets tended to form a sub-culture within the profession, by focussing on those elements of practice they saw to be fundamentally different from working with young people in clubs and centres.

Phrases such as ‘working with young people on their own turf’ and ‘no building – no power’, were commonly used to denote the difference. These were based on assumptions that young people felt more ownership over the public spaces they choose to gather in, than over spaces provided for them by adults; and that in this context, the working relationship was more equitable because workers were not viewed by young people to be in authority over the setting.

Since the early nineties, preoccupation with the difference between these types of youth work has given way to ongoing experimentation with the ways they inter-relate and complement each other.

Now the emphasis is on mixing and matching street-based work with centre based work to achieve a wholly more sophisticated and inclusive style of delivery: A style of delivery that whilst firmly grounded in a set of common values, can vary in form, as and when required, to meet the changing needs of different groups within the community at any given time. For example, it is often the case that groups who would not normally choose to access their local youth centre will do so if they are first given a chance to get to know the workers on the street. Equally, a group who stops using a centre may remain a priority group within the locality, with needs that can continue to be met by youth work on the streets.

Within this more flexible and dynamic approach to youth work, the street-based youth work element performs a number of valuable functions:-

1. gaining an overview of the 'Youth Service'

It enables local youth work teams to establish and maintain a professional working over-view of their local 'youth scene'. (e.g. which young people do what?-when? where? and why?)

2. increasing profile & contact

it increases the teams profile and contact-base – both generally within the wider community; and more specifically among those young people who do not use the centre.

3. assessing need

it allows the team to assess, analyse and prioritise the needs of different groups. (on grounds of inclusion, it is important for teams to be aware of which groups they are and are not working with at any given time- and why?)

4. targeting

it provides teams with a mechanism for targeting and engaging harder-to-reach groups within their area who may be more 'in need' and/or at risk.

5. developing non-aligned responses

it affords flexibility to develop and offer 'non-aligned' programmes of work – i.e. 'detached' programmes of activity, learning and support that are not seen to be associated with a youth centre or other institutional providers.

6. improving centre-based access and inclusion

it offers new and/or excluded groups support to access the centre and develop their stake in shaping its programmes and activities alongside other existing users.

7. providing on-the-spot info, guidance & support (street bags)

'Street-bags' (rucksacks filled with carefully selected young-person-friendly leaflets and curriculum materials) are used to enhance the educative content of street-level discussions; and enable the team to deliver on-the-spot information, guidance and support.

8. 'signposting' to other services

Provided the team is well networked and has good referral arrangements in place, SBYW can encourage and enable young people to access other services that they may need. It does so, not by simply pointing them in the direction ('signposting') but by also acting as a 'stepping stone' to help them bridge the often perceived gap.

9. advocacy

When youth workers spend substantive periods of time with young people in community settings, they often spot needs, qualities and potential that others may not have recognised. Where this is the case

- And young people are not in a position to articulate it for themselves
- Youth workers have a responsibility to advocate on their behalf.

10. facilitating community involvement and cohesion

SBYW is well placed to promote and support young people's active participation in important community initiatives and processes e.g.:-

- Local democracy and decision-making
- Community planning and regeneration
- Community safety and cohesion

11. prevention & diversion

it makes a recognised contribution to preventing and diverting young people from harm. Government guidance in the form of 'Transforming youth work' describes youth workers (particularly outreach and detached) as being "well placed to develop relationships with young people at risk, identify issues and intervene to prevent problems."