Research Digest

The Benefits of Youth Work
Young People's and Youth Workers' Perspectives

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Introduction

Last June saw the publication of the report *The Purpose and Outcomes of Youth Work*[1]. It was the result of a research project commissioned by the 'Interagency Group' of major youth organisations: Catholic Youth Care, City of Dublin Youth Service Board, Foróige, Ógra Chorcai and Youth Work Ireland. The research was financially supported by the Irish Youth Foundation. It set out to explore the nature, purpose and outcomes of youth work in Ireland today, prompted by a concern that at a time of very significant change in the social, economic and policy contexts, it is more important than ever to articulate the distinctive nature of youth work and what its benefits are not just for young people but for adults, communities and for society as a whole.

It was decided at the outset by the researchers and the Interagency Group that the research objectives could best be achieved by a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, involving semi-structured interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire survey. It was also agreed that the research would be of most use to the broader youth work sector if it engaged in a close examination of projects or groups that were well established and known to have a track record of effective and successful practice, rather than a study of what is necessarily typical or 'representative' of current youth work in Ireland. As a result five case study sites were identified, reflecting the composition of the Interagency Group and also including a range of types of provision and context (community-based project, local youth service, volunteer-led youth group, urban and rural settings). The case study sites were:

- Blanchardstown, County Dublin (Blanchardstown Youth Service, Foróige);
- Ennis, County Clare (Clare Youth Services, Youth Work Ireland);
- Loughlynn, County Roscommon (Loughlynn Foróige Club);
- Rialto, Dublin 8 (St Andrew's Youth Project, CDYSB);
- Ronanstown, County Dublin (Ronanstown Youth Service, CYC).

Within each of the case study sites, and as indicated above, a number of methods were used. Firstly, semi-structured interviews with key informants (managers and/or senior practitioners) were used to contextualise the research and gather background information. Secondly, focus groups were held with youth workers (paid and volunteer) and with young people; in total there were 33 adult focus group participants and 41 young people. Finally, in order to gather more comprehensive data at the level of individual young people and youth workers (demographic information, part-time/full-time/volunteer status

of workers, duration of young people's involvement and perceived benefits, strength of agreement or disagreement with specific attitudes or opinions, and so on) and tentatively explore the relationship between certain variables (for example duration of involvement and perceived benefits) it was decided to conduct a questionnaire survey within each case study site, going beyond the focus group membership.

The case study sites in this research were selected 'purposively' (that is deliberately, because of certain attributes already known to the researchers) rather than on a randomized probability basis. The participants in the focus groups responded to an open invitation to take part, so there was a strong element of self-selection involved; and the distribution and collection of questionnaires took a form which social researchers would call 'convenience sampling'. Existing opportunities and contacts within each site were used to distribute as many questionnaires as possible and people were encouraged to respond, but given the small number of sites the overall number of responses is of necessity quite low (61 adults and 172 young people). For all these reasons it is very important to stress that the findings make no claim to being representative of the Irish youth work sector in general. They do however provide insights into the attitudes and experiences of selected groups of young people and youth workers and certainly suggest lines of enquiry for further research, both qualitative and quantitative.

Literature review

The Interagency Group and the researchers agreed that the research report would take as its starting point the definition in Youth Work Act 2001, according to which youth work is:

> A planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is:
> (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and
> (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.

This definition was chosen because, apart from its status in law, it had been designed to take into account the views of youth work organisations and interests and was broadly in keeping with the approach to youth work taken in successive policy documents over the previous twenty years (Department of Education, 1980; National Youth Policy Committee, 1984; Government of Ireland 1985, 1995; NYCI, 1994). The definition stresses 'the fundamentally developmental and educational nature of [youth] work; the fact that it rests on the voluntary participation of young people; and the fact that it has been, and is, in the main provided by voluntary organisations' (Department of Education and Science, 2003: 13).

Notably, the definition also stresses both the personal and social aspects of the development that is intended to take place for young people through youth work. It is suggested in the report that, despite many national differences, these two dimensions taken together might provide a common denominator for youth work in Europe. A Council of Europe/European Commission partnership publication comments that:

> [Generally] youth work is defined as a domain of 'out-of-school' education and thus linked to non-formal or informal learning ... Most definitions

contain two basic orientations reflecting a *double concern*: to provide favourable (leisure time oriented) experiences (of social, cultural, educational or political nature) in order to strengthen young people's personal development and foster their personal and social autonomy; and at the same time to offer opportunities for the integration and inclusion of young people in adult society by fostering societal integration in general or preventing the exclusion of disadvantaged groups (Lauritzen, 2005; ECKYP 2008).

The literature review of the Purpose and Outcomes research report goes on to highlight a number of other key features of youth work about which there appears to be increasing consensus, including:

- the broad range of *activities and programmes* it encompasses, and the fact that it is not just the activities but the way they are *planned, facilitated and evaluated* that matters;
- the integration of both *non-formal* and *informal* education and learning;
- the importance of underpinning *values and principles* such as: young people's voluntary participation; 'starting where young people are at' but also challenging them to go further; treating people of all ages with respect; recognising and upholding equity, diversity and interdependence; involving and valuing peers, family, community and culture; working in partnership with young people and with other relevant agencies; recognizing the importance of feelings as well as knowledge and skills in human development; empowering young people and giving them a voice; and safeguarding the welfare of young people (based on Lifelong Learning UK, 2008);
- the emphasis on *process* (how things are done as well as what is done), *participation* (young people actively and appropriately involved in all aspects of youth work) and *positive relationships* (among young people and between young people and adults).
- the commitment to a vision of youth work 'which *values diversity*, aims to *eradicate injustice and inequality*, and strives for openness and inclusiveness in all its dealings with young people and adults' (Department of Education and Science, 2003: 15);
- the provision of opportunities for promoting and *enhancing intergenerational solidarity* and building 'social capital' (resources of trust, reciprocity, mutual regard and support) throughout society as a whole.

The remainder of the *Purpose and Outcomes* report presents the findings of the interviews, focus groups and questionnaires with youth workers and young people. A selection of the findings will be given below.

Youth workers' perspectives

The purpose of youth work

While the precise words used varied, there was virtual unanimity within the focus groups that the key purpose of youth work is primarily educational and developmental. It might be suggested that the 'dominant discourse' of youth workers, when they are asked spontaneously to identify the purpose of their work, is personal development within a community context. This worker's view was not untypical:

> *One thing I hold dear is the sense of our mission or our purpose. That to me is the point*
> *I bring most people back to about what we're doing, what we're trying to achieve ...*

enabling young people to develop themselves and contribute to the development of their communities.

The 'universal' benefits of youth work

The prevailing view was that youth work should be available (and can be beneficial) to all young people regardless of socio-economic status, although there was also a recognition that funding is currently not adequate to reach out to all young people who wish to participate. One worker commented:

> *And then there's pressure on us to go into the other direction in the other part of [the community], where there is a huge youth population, but it's not a disadvantaged area. Sometimes I think that's a problem for youth work, it's become ghettoised, it's become seen as a response to [the] disadvantaged.*

Relationships

The findings suggest that youth work rests on the simultaneous operation of multiple different types and levels of relationships. One is the relationship of the young people to the adult workers, who may be the only adults outside their own families (or unfortunately in a small number of cases even including their own families) with whom they consistently engage in constructive and positive interaction. Youth work also facilitates the development of positive relationships between young people themselves, within the peer group or across different age groups, where the model of the youth worker-young person relationship can act as an example. A further dimension is the way in which young people have the opportunity to observe positive relationships *between adults* or within adult groups, and – most importantly – adults have the opportunity to have positive experiences of young people. This can have a very important knock-on effect on local intergenerational relationships and community spirit – significant elements of social capital as mentioned earlier. One worker summed up the multiplicity of the relationships at play as follows.

> *They get important social skills developed inside the youth club because they are with their own age group, they are with the members, the senior members, the leaders, they are kind of speaking to all different age groups, they are speaking to their own age, younger age[s], their peers, older groups, so there is more confidence there.*

Participation and empowerment

It is an explicit part of youth work's concern as described by these workers to facilitate the active engagement and participation of young people, to promote their empowerment and the development of a sense of working together as partners. On a number of occasions the youth workers (like the young people) drew comparisons between the formal educational setting and the youth work context. One volunteer worker who was also a teacher made the following point.

> *The big difference between the teacher relationship and the leader relationship is the leader is encouraging a member to take control, they want them to take control ... of the situation and handle the situation and they are just there to support them, to just point out something that is going on that maybe they don't see. You were asking*

> *about what they've got from it … For me, observing members, I would say the one big thing I see and you can actually see it happening as the year goes on, the way they can speak …*

Positive attitudes towards young people

Many workers stressed the importance of taking a positive view of young people and their potential and noted that this was in contrast to how young people are frequently perceived and portrayed elsewhere.

> *I suppose the underpinning [value] is the passion for young people and to see young people doing well, I think that is common across the youth service. I suppose the approach in how you treat people, probably, I would have to say there is a Christian approach here, I won't say a Catholic approach but there is definitely a Christian approach here … I suppose you are looking at young people and you want the best for them.*

Youth work takes time

Respondents frequently stressed that for youth work to be successful, sufficient time has to be allowed for relationships to develop and for growth and development to take place.

> *… in my experience I get a lot of particularly vulnerable young people, they come in and they have very little self-confidence, they have very little attention span, very little want or need, they think, to learn. So it takes a lot of time to actually build them up to the stage where they are actually achieving things and recognising their achievements. Once you see them actually doing that and once you see their faces, when something clicks and they realise, God, I've done this myself, I never thought I could do this, it's just that glimmer.*

There were numerous references in the focus groups to the need for patience and the importance of recognising that while there are often valuable outcomes for young people in the short term, more profound benefits can often take years to emerge.

> *I mean [it's been] four and five years and some of them now are coming through as leaders, when you really feel a huge shift, a huge change, really measurable change, but that's over a period of time of them buying in as children. It's over a long time, there are a lot of highs, a lot of lows as well within that and they've worked with different youth workers and very strong relationships with the youth project …*

Positive outcomes

The focus group participants were asked to identify examples of positive outcomes of youth work, drawing on their own direct experience. Among the main themes emerging were the following.

- Positive *feelings* (a group of workers spoke of a young man with low self-esteem who was rarely given the chance to excel being 'cock of the walk' when they deliberately created the opportunity for him to display his angling skills to other young people).

- Positive *experiences* (a worker remarked of a community event at which the group had given an arts performance: 'the smiles on the young people's faces ... it's great').
- Positive *behaviour* (one young man who was training to be a leader was able to look back and think about his own negative behaviour and relate that to how he would go about working with young people himself).
- Positive *influences* and social *integration* ('We have a really good mix of youngsters on a lot of the projects. Which I think has real benefits for [all of them]').
- *Practical skills* ('I've known ex-members who are involved in societies in college who were amazed at how lacking in skills their peers were when it came to organising').
- *Qualifications* (in one project young people who were alienated from the school system – in some cases actually expelled – were being given the chance to study for formal state examinations in the centre itself and there were some notable success stories).
- *Jobs* (career opportunities have been improved through young people's enhanced knowledge, skills and confidence: 'We'll have our few doctors and solicitors very shortly [who were members of the project] ... We have our first teacher ever in the area').
- Enhanced *family life* ('Whatever experience they have on one of the projects, they go home and ... can influence the people who are surrounding them, a chain reaction that we can never put numbers on or put in a report at the end of the year').
- A better *sense of community* ('... the centre is twenty four years in the community ... I know it's a youth service, but it is also community based in that you have parents and grannies and everyone coming in ... They would come in with lost cats or anything ...').
- Improving *local conditions and services* ('Everything which has been set up since [twenty years ago], the youth project has been instrumental [in it]. Whether that was the the youth initiative, the information centre, the family centre...').

Rewards and challenges

In the questionnaire survey youth workers were asked in an open-ended question what they find rewarding and challenging about their work (they could identify more than one thing). Figures 1 and 2 show the results broken down by gender. With regard to rewards, it is clear that young people's achievements are experienced as by far the most rewarding aspect for these workers: almost two thirds of those surveyed identified this aspect, with significant proportions also mentioning relationships, young people's enjoyment and the appreciation shown by young people to workers. There is however a somewhat different pattern for men and women: young people's achievements rank even higher among men, being mentioned by four out of five male respondents, while relationships are mentioned by more than five times as many women as men.
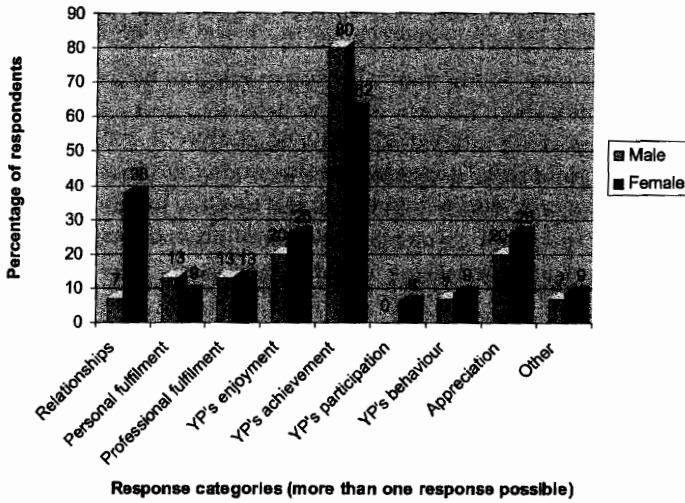
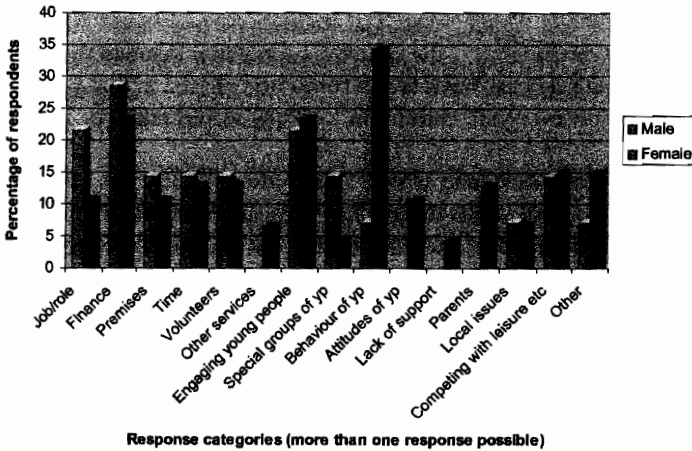**Figure 1:** *Rewards by gender*

Figure 2: *Challenges/difficulties by gender*

Regarding challenges, behavioural aspects, funding/finances and engaging young people are significantly more commonly mentioned than any other dimensions. Once again there is a difference by gender, with five times as many women as men identifying young people's behaviour as challenging, and slightly more men than women identifying funding/finances.

The distinctive nature of youth work

When the youth workers were asked in the questionnaire survey what makes youth work distinctive (again in an open-ended question with the option to give more than one answer), the five most commonly identified aspects, in order of frequency, were:

- Providing a *voice* and a *role* for young people (36.5%).
- The youth work *process* (31.7%).
- Young people's *voluntary involvement* (30.2%).
- Youth work is *needs-based* (28.6%).
- The youth work *relationship* (22.2%).

Once again there were some interesting differences by gender (see Figure 3). Firstly, women identified a broader range of features than men. Secondly, they ranked all of the top five aspects (above) higher than men did, notably so in the case of the voice of young people and the importance of relationships (the figure being exactly double in each case: 40%/20% and 26%/13%). Thirdly, the men in this small survey are a lot more likely to identify the nature of the activities in youth work as something which makes it distinctive (27% as opposed to 15%).
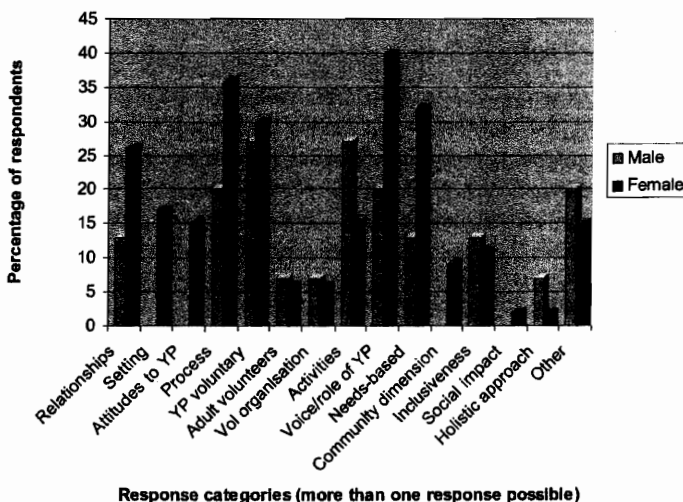
Response categories (more than one response possible)

Figure 3: *Distinctive nature of youth work by gender*

Taken together, the findings in this small scale study relating to rewards and challenges and to the distinctive features of youth work raise the issue of whether in some respects quite traditional gender differences continue to be reflected in men's and women's perspectives on and experiences of youth work. This could usefully be explored through further research.

Young People's Perspectives

When asked what they most enjoyed about attending the youth group, by far the most common response among the young people related to socialising (mentioned by 64% in total, 70% of young women and 58% of young men), followed by reference to the particular activities or programmes on offer (mentioned just over one third of both groups). The voluntary nature of their participation was regarded as very important.

> Anna   *What is it that is different that happens here in the youth service than if you went to just an art group?*
>
> Val   *Like in school, you have to do it. It's voluntary participation if you want to do it in the youth project, they would encourage you to do it, but it's up to yourself whether you actually want to do it or not.*
>
> Anna   *What keeps you coming back?*
>
> Val   *You have fun and you get the choice whether you want to do it or not. Obviously if you want to do it, you will come back to do it.*

The fact that even though youth work is voluntary the youth workers actively encourage participation was highlighted a number of times.

> Maurice   *Does it make a difference that you can choose to be there or not … how does that make a difference?*
>
> Una   *I don't feel you have to go, but in the youth club if you don't want to go they'll ring you and say are you coming but if you don't come they're not going to give out to you. If you have something else to do, they're not going to mind whereas in school you'd be in trouble and they'd be ringing your ma and saying were you coming. It's more of a choice in the centre, it's more relaxed.*

Like the youth workers, the young people were asked to identify positive outcomes and benefits from youth work. The main findings are summarised below.

Friends

In keeping with the importance attached to being able to socialize in an enjoyable atmosphere, friends were frequently the first benefit mentioned, as in the case of the following two young people.

> *Friends, I wouldn't have met any of these, if I wasn't here. We all met at the bands night. We met around here.*
>
> *I have a friend who moved down from Dublin a year or so ago and he didn't really know anyone, so I brought him here one day and it's great here because the atmosphere here is like the first day, whenever I walked in it was, hey what's up and the first day he came in, ten minutes later he was having a laugh with everyone. So he was up by twenty friends that day anyway.*

New activities and opportunities

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they had taken part in activities in their project or group which they had not taken part in before or would not have been able to take part in otherwise. Well over two thirds of the respondents (69.2%) answered that they had. When those who responded positively were then asked what types of activity youth work opened up to them, 'recreational programmes' was the most common category, followed by 'outings/trips', 'new hobbies', 'new skills' and a broad category of 'educational programmes' (as with most of the other questions in the questionnaire, the question was open-ended and these categories are based on the researchers' classification of the responses).

Generally speaking – and not surprisingly perhaps – the longer young people in this survey have been involved in youth work the more likely it is that they have experienced new activities or opportunities. This is shown clearly in Figure 4, where just over half of the young people involved for less than three months gave a positive response, whereas among young people involved for three years or more the figure is 83%.
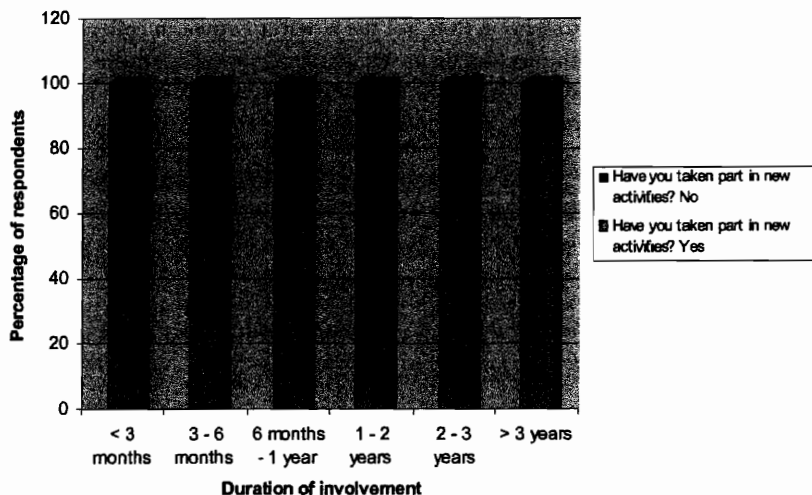

Figure 4: *New activities/opportunities by duration of involvement*

Informal and non-formal learning

The young people appeared to be very aware that both 'non-formal' and 'informal learning' take place in youth work, even though they did not use these terms.

> Carol   Yeah, you don't even know its happening, it's just, you know we learned how to cook and we didn't realise it, I just remembered how to do it and rowing and orienteering and aerobics, and all about the environment, they teach like how important [it is] when all the trees and everything are getting cut down, they teach you that's bad and they tell you why it's bad and all.

> Anna   But you could learn that in school too. What's different about how you learn it here?
>
> Carol   It's more relaxed. In school you have to learn it because you'll be tested on it and if you don't know it you're in trouble but in this place they're not going to give out to you.
>
> Ben   It's more enjoyable that way.

Formal education

For some young people, their experience of formal education was also a more positive one because of their involvement in youth work. In one case a young man described how a youth worker had quickly discovered he was having difficulty with school and took steps to support him.

> I came in just for a day and he asked was I in school, I said no, I was kicked out I think I was, and I didn't go for six months and then Peter just got me into school and then he got me into a load of clubs ...

A young woman commented that 'they [the youth workers] help you a lot. They got [her friend] Patrick back into school, they got me a better course in college'. It has also already been mentioned in the section on youth workers' views that there are now cases where youth work projects and premises may actually go so far as being the direct providers or facilitators of formal educational programmes.

> Anna   So to sum up, what would you think is the biggest thing you got from being a member here? ...
>
> Colette   I'm doing me Leaving Cert here as well, so I wouldn't have got that. I'd have left it. I'm doing it with the project now ... .
>
> Von   Yeah, things like the FETAC and that like, I wouldn't have done anything like that, only for the youth project. Wouldn't have went to America.

Advice and information

The young people also drew attention to youth work's role in providing them with important advice and information, often in relatively informal ways. As one young woman said, 'they have loads of leaflets on the table and when you're just sitting there you see them so you read them and you learn a lot of stuff'. A young man had no hesitation when asked what he could talk to youth workers about so as to gain information or support: 'Drugs, alcohol, sexual health. Responsibilities, relationships, loads'.

Positive changes

As shown above, the adult workers described what they perceived as positive changes in young people as a result of participating in youth work. The young people themselves tended to agree. In the questionnaire survey the young people were asked whether they could 'see any changes' in themselves 'as a result of being involved' in youth work. Overall, more than two thirds of the respondents (67.2%) said that they could, and generally speaking it appears that after a relatively short period of involvement the young people in this survey are likely to report that they can see changes. Among those

involved for three months or less, 40% said they could see a change, whereas among those involved for more than three years the figure is almost double that, at 77% (although the pattern is not clear cut - see the full report for details).

It is also instructive to explore the relationship between the type of change perceived and the duration of the young person's involvement in youth work. Figure 5 summarises the pattern. It is notable that the longer the young people in this survey have been involved, the less likely they are to mention greater sociability as a change they see in themselves, and the *more* likely they are to highlight positive personal development. The latter category replaces the former in frequency of mention as the duration of involvement increases. Of course the questionnaire can only gauge the *perceptions* of respondents rather than actual changes over time, and it does not in any case claim to be representative of all young people involved in youth work, but it might be tentatively suggested on the basis of these findings that in the early stages of their involvement young people are most conscious of how youth work helps them to relate to *others* (overcoming shyness, becoming more outgoing and so on) whereas later they may come to take these social skills for granted and are more conscious of how youth work is enabling them to develop as individuals.
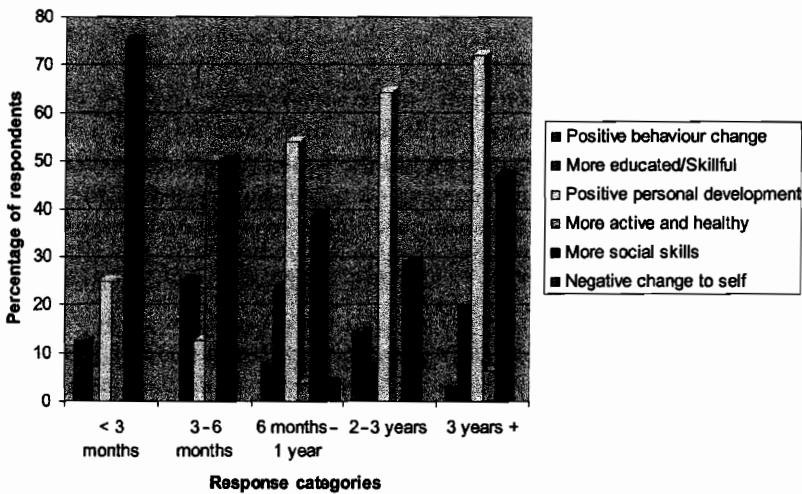

Figure 5: *Type of change by duration of involvement*

Participation

Generally, the chance to be involved in making decisions was very highly valued by the young people in the focus groups – it was regarded as both challenging and enjoyable. As one young woman put it, 'you feel powerful when you can do that'. Participation was often described in terms of negotiation.

> *Anna*   Would you have much of a say in what happens here?
>
> *Val*   Yeah, if you're in a group they won't just say ... they will say what do you want to do for the year.

Joe　　It's fifty/fifty, we meet them half way.

Anna　　How did that get worked out, did you have a negotiation with them, they say no you can't do it and you keep pushing to do it or what is the conversation like?

Colette　It's not only their point of view, they come and ask you your point of view.

Val　　If you can't do it, they explain why you can't do it. They just don't say, you can't do it and that's the end of it, they say we can't do it for these reasons.

Maurice And you trust them if they tell you it can't be done for a particular reason?

Val　　Yeah.

The questionnaire findings also suggest that young people do think they are involved in decision-making in youth work. When asked if they had a say in decision-making in their group or project, four out of five respondents (80.4%) said that they did, and when they were then asked about the nature of the decisions which they had a part in making, 'choosing activities' was the most common response (52.3%), with 'voicing your opinion' (in an unspecified way) and 'electing a committee/voting' the next two most common, at 25.8% and 19.7% respectively.

Relationships and respect

Active participation and involvement in decision-making requires that positive relationships exist between young people and adults, and this was a further area explored in the research project. Sometimes the young people drew attention to the way the relationships developed over time – a point also stressed by the adult focus group participants – and to the 'balancing act' that is required on the worker's behalf.

Joe　　[A]t some point you cross the line where they are youth leaders and then they become friends, and that's good ... .

Jill　　But you still have a kind of respect as well for them, because you know, they are our friends as well, they are only trying to do their job and we understand they wouldn't ever really give out to us, but when they tell you to stop doing something, you listen to them more.

Joe　　It's not like a thing that they are angry, just disappointed. They make you feel horrible. You come in the next week and ... .

Maurice But they do have authority then?

Carol　Yeah they do.

Maurice And you recognise that and respect that?

Joe　　There's a line.

This latter point was echoed a number of times in the focus groups: youth workers have a distinctive type of authority (partly based on the friendship component of their relationship with young people) and/or a distinctive style of exercising it.

Conclusions

The findings in *The Purpose and Outcomes of Youth Work* suggest that when youth work is done well (and as already indicated the case studies were chosen on the basis that they had a track record of success and represented 'good practice') it can have a wide range of beneficial outcomes that are evident to both young people and youth workers (although of course there are differences of emphasis and terminology between the two groups). The benefits include:

- enhanced personal attributes and qualities such as confidence, self-esteem, awareness (personal and social), amicability and sociability;
- opportunities for association with others in a positive context, strengthening bonds with existing friends and making new ones, often from diverse backgrounds;
- new and more diverse experiences and opportunities (which are more likely with longer periods of involvement) which in turn enhance personal development;
- enhanced positive and pro-social behaviour and diminishing negative and anti-social behaviour;
- practical skills (for example making decisions, planning and organizing, budgeting, cooking, teamwork, group work, communications, arts and creativity; and numerous sports, games and physical activities);
- information, advice and advocacy in relation to (for example) health, relationships, sexuality, the law, careers and formal education;
- practical support in young people's engagement with formal education and in some cases direct provision of (and support for) alternative routes to qualifications;
- support for young people's families by youth workers, integration of family members within the work of the youth group/project, and more positive approaches to parenting (and to young people in general) by adults involved in youth work;
- improved communications and relationships between young people and adults within communities; opportunities for practical intergenerational cooperation at local level;
- improvement in local conditions and amenities, developing local leadership (among both young people and adults), cooperation and coordination with other local services which may avoid duplication and facilitate sharing of learning, resources and approaches.

As the list above makes clear, the most obvious benefits of youth work are for individual young people (including 'concrete' benefits such as information, practical skills, enhanced educational or employment opportunities; and less tangible ones such as confidence, self-esteem, tolerance and sociability). But there are also benefits for the adults involved, both paid staff and volunteers – much the same range of benefits as for young people. There are benefits at the level of neighbourhoods and communities as well – more positive relationships between old and young, reduced tension, better amenities or an enhanced physical environment, more coordinated and effective service provision. Furthermore, because youth work clubs and projects at local level are very often affiliated to regional or national and even international networks, and

because the young people and adults who participate in a youth group carry the benefits of their involvement with them into many other areas of social action and interaction, there are broader societal benefits as well.

The report concludes that in terms of positive intergenerational relationships – a key aspect of social capital – youth work has a vital and distinctive role to play, one that may in fact have few parallels, given the voluntary nature of young people's involvement and the fact that they speak so positively about their relationships with adults and the mutual respect which they perceive to characterise those relationships. Their views are borne out by the contributions of the adult respondents, paid and volunteer. Taken together with the other examples in the report of what Putnam (2000) calls 'bridging social capital' (strengthening relationships between different groups), for example in terms of socio-economic diversity or 'social mix', these findings suggest that all those concerned with youth work policy and practice should renew their focus on the social as well as the personal outcomes of youth work, and on the ways in which the two are inextricably linked, all the more so at a time of unprecedented social change.

Notes

1. M. Devlin and A. Gunning, *The Purpose and Outcomes of Youth Work*, Dublin, Irish Youth Work Press, 2009. For more information contact: Fran Bissett, Irish Youth Work Centre, Youth Work Ireland, 20 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 21. Tel: 01 8729933. fbissett@youthworkirewland.ie

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