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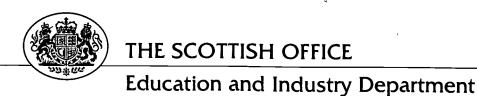IDENTIFIERS   *Scotland

ABSTRACT
        Research was conducted in Scotland to evaluate the
effectiveness of youth work with vulnerable young people, primarily between
the ages of 13 and 16. Four complementary methods were adopted: (1) a survey
of secondary school students; (2) a series of focus group interviews with
young people with experience of youth work; (3) interviews with vulnerable
young people; and (4) interviews with key service providers. The research
focused on 6 geographic areas of Scotland, 3 characterized by urban poverty
and 3 characterized by rural poverty. Findings were that teenagers tended to
move away from organized youth activities between the ages of 14 and 16, and
that organized youth work appealed the most to those under 14. Participation
in sports and other organized activities tended to decline with age as young
people enjoyed more casual leisure activities and commercial activities.
Young people reported spending a significant portion of their time "hanging
around." While nearly 6 in 10 had been a member of some sort of youth group,
this percentage declined with age, especially for females. Young people were
relatively positive toward youth work, but were not likely to seek guidance
or counseling from youth workers. Overall, the most vulnerable young people
were the least likely to participate in youth groups, but those who did
received benefits and generally spent less time hanging around. The
principles of effective youth work identified by the Scottish Inspectorate
(education agency) were generally being met, but there were causes for
concern in the underutilization of youth services by older teens and the
reluctance of these adolescents to seek counseling and guidance. Policy
implications are discussed. (SLD)

THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

Education and Industry Department

No 51

Youth Work with Vulnerable Young People

Research and Intelligence Unit

Why *Interchange?*

Research cannot make the decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education in our schools and colleges. Nor can it by itself bring about change. However, it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

It is important that every opportunity should be taken to communicate research findings, both inside and outside The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID). Moreover, if research is to have the greatest possible impact on policy and practice, the findings need to be presented in an accessible, interesting and attractive form to policy makers, teachers, lecturers, parents and employers.

Interchange aims to improve further the Research and Intelligence Unit's (RIU) dissemination of the findings of research funded by SOEID. We hope you will find that *Interchange* is long enough to give the flavour of the complexities, subtleties and limitations of a research study but concise enough to give a good feeling for the findings and in some cases to encourage you to obtain the full report.

*The **Interchange** symbol invites you to reflect and respond to an issue or question posed by the research. You may wish to raise awareness by responding to each **Interchange** before reading the adjacent section of text. Alternatively, you may prefer to read the text first then review each **Interchange** to construct a personal summary of the issues.*

Youth work with vulnerable young people

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Local authorities and voluntary organisations provide a range of activities and support for young people but changes in our society raise issues about whether youth work provision is meeting the needs of the most vulnerable young people. Transitions from child to adult have become complex and it may no longer be appropriate to use models of youth work designed for a more clearly defined group. The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department commissioned a study of how youth work is currently meeting the needs of vulnerable young people between the ages of 13 and 16. The project was carried out from January 1996 to June 1997 by the Scottish Council of Research in Education and the Youth Education and Employment Research Unit at Glasgow University and drew on the views of youth work providers and young people about the effectiveness and relevance of community education.

Aims and methods of the study

The central objective of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of youth work with vulnerable young people — primarily between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. Four complementary methods were adopted: a survey of secondary school pupils, a series of focus group interviews with young people with experience of youth work, and individual interviews with particularly vulnerable young people and with key service providers. There was also a workshop session for providers and others to comment on the validity of the findings and to discuss evaluation strategies.

The research focused on youth work activities in six geographical areas of Scotland where for different reasons, a significant proportion of young people might be seen as vulnerable. In broad terms three areas were characterised by urban deprivation and three by rural poverty and/or isolation. The researchers argued that in these areas young people are vulnerable to a series of risks and were concerned to identify the extent to which involvement in youth groups could be associated with reduction of risk behaviour. The survey provides an overview of patterns of involvement in youth groups and examines significant differences in use between males and females, between those from different socio-economic backgrounds and according to age.

How young people spend their leisure

Leisure activities are shaped by factors including gender, age, social class, access to resources and local provision. This study showed that:
- Teenagers moved from leisure at home or in organised activities to more casual activities between the ages of 14 and 16. Organised youth work appealed most to under-14 year-olds.
- Patterns changed with age: older young people were less likely to

Participation in organized activities declined as young people engaged in more casual pursuits.

In what ways can youth work provide alternatives to commercial leisure activities?

spend time with families than with mixed sex groups and with boyfriends and girlfriends.

- Participation in sports and other organised activities tended to decline in early adolescence as young people began to engage in more casual leisure pursuits and commercial activities, such as discos and dancing.
- There were no significant differences between young people in families with, or without, a full-time wage earner but young people participating in the study were likely to have a narrow leisure life style due to living in relatively disadvantaged areas of the country where they have access to a limited range of facilities.
- Young people reported spending a significant proportion of their time 'hanging around'. When this was outside their homes, they frequently engaged in behaviour which made them vulnerable to police attention. and intervention. Both males and females mentioned conflicts with the police.

Participation of young people in youth and activity groups

Findings show that:
- About half the girls and six in ten boys were currently involved in a youth club, uniformed organisation or activity group with participation declining with age – female membership of youth groups declined more sharply than males'.
- Nearly six in ten young people had been members of a uniformed group. Nevertheless, membership of uniformed organisations and youth clubs was less common among this sample of vulnerable young people than in the more representative sample reported by Hendry and colleagues (1992).
- The cost of participation in many youth groups is low. Whilst family circumstances did not have an impact on patterns of participation among females, males from families without a full-time wage earner were significantly less likely to attend.

What do young people think of youth work?

Young people in this study tended to be relatively positive towards youth work.
- Young people clearly valued the opportunity for social contact and appreciated having access to a place where they could meet or make friends. There were complaints about 'troublemakers' attracted to some clubs, and older young people often felt constrained by the presence of younger members.
- Youth organisations provided young people with the chance to develop new skills and take part in activities which might normally be outside their financial reach.
- Youth clubs organised by community education stood out as providing a useful source of information on personal and social issues such as AIDS and drugs.

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- Youth group members tended to be relatively happy with their level of involvement in decision-making (especially about choice of activities) but they were given little real responsibility either on a financial level or in terms of making and enforcing rules.
- One area in which youth work failed to meet objectives was in guidance and counselling. Among those attending youth groups, just one in twenty said that they would discuss personal concerns with a youth worker. However, among the clients of detached youth workers, the guidance function appeared to be effective and provided extremely vulnerable young people with an essential source of advice and support.
- The best youth workers were seen as those who were friendly, approachable, had a sense of humour and were tolerant of the members. The worst were strict or bossy and tried to impose their own standards on the young people.

Youth work failed to meet objectives in guidance and counselling.

How might youth workers improve guidance and counselling?

How effective is youth work in reducing vulnerability?

The survey showed that:
- The most vulnerable were least likely to participate in organised youth activities: those who truanted, those who had been excluded from school and those who had been before a children's panel.
- Members of youth clubs and groups tended to spend less time 'hanging around' and were occupied at times when they might have engaged in risky behaviour or become the focus of police attention. However, those from families without a full-time wage-earner were just as likely to report 'hanging around' regularly even when they were members of a youth group.
- Youth clubs and groups tend to be available for a limited number of evenings (typically two) per week: young people who lacked financial resources to develop a range of leisure activities still spent a lot of time 'hanging around'.
- Relatively few young people admitted involvement in illegal activities (including drugs), although those most heavily involved were less likely to participate in youth groups.
- No significant differences in self-esteem were found, as measured by the Lawrence Scale, according to whether or not respondents were currently members of a youth group.

Multi-level analysis was used for a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between youth work and the reduction of vulnerability. The 'high risk' group identified included those involved in drug abuse, those who had been excluded from school and those with a high level of involvement in criminal activities.

- Among 'high risk' young people, levels of participation in youth groups were relatively low.
- Those from families without a full-time wage-earner or who reported spending a lot of time 'hanging around' were most likely to fall into this 'high risk' category.
- Multi-level analysis showed that current membership of a youth group

Which groups of young people are not being catered for in current youth work provision?

was not of itself associated with a reduction in risk. However, participation in a youth club meant young people spent less time 'hanging around' on the streets which in turn could indirectly reduce risk.

Managing youth work

Most areas offered extensive and varied provision for young people but it was difficult to establish exactly how much youth work existed within a particular locality. The main obstacle was the sheer variety of provision, different funding and the lack of central co-ordination at the local level.

- Each locality had a different mix of 'traditional' youth work, sports groups, interest groups and uniformed organisations. There was also a diverse range of initiatives developed to meet particular local needs.
- There were remarkably few cases of detached or outreach work which often targets the most vulnerable young people in our society.
- Providing up-to-date, accurate information and offering activities to enhance young people's confidence and self esteem are two approaches used by youth workers. Detached work is more directly responsive to the needs and problems identified by individual vulnerable young people.
- A difficulty faced by providers is being able to respond to changes in society and to the challenges presented by the high-tech culture of the young generation. Traditional youth groups have few facilities using new technology and their image tends to be unglamorous compared with (more expensive) commercial leisure attractions which may be available locally.
- Youth work is dependent on voluntary workers who have least qualifications but the most direct and sustained contact with young people. In practice fully trained qualified youth workers find themselves spending less time with young people and more on administration and fund raising.
- This study took place during the year of transition to new unitary authorities in Scotland and the major concerns for providers are shortage of funds and uncertainty of future funding. The main issue facing youth work providers is economic survival and reliance on untrained workers in key roles. The result is methodological conservatism reflecting low resources and uncertainty.

Detached youth work often targets the most vulnerable young people.

Should more priority be given to the development of detached youth work?

Working with vulnerable young people and measuring success

- Providers indicated that it is often very difficult to engage with young people deemed most at risk. Some reported difficulties due to disruptive individual influences.
- Providers felt their work contributed to reducing vulnerability among young people. Promoting self confidence and self esteem allowed

young people to take control of their lives and be less influenced by
negative experiences. Interaction with adults provided positive role
models and opportunities to discuss personal issues. However, potential
reductions in vulnerability were more likely among relatively less
vulnerable young people.

- Information from detached/outreach workers in two localities and from
the young people they work with, supports the assertion that they are
engaging those young people who are among the most vulnerable in the
community.

- Mechanisms of evaluation are currently too underdeveloped to confirm
success or failure. Some community education workers doubted the
ability of evaluations to account for the complexity of youth work aims
and outcomes. They often quoted the number of young people attending
groups and activities as some measure of success. They were more
likely to record activities than experiences in youth work.

- Providers were less aware of other dimensions and approaches to
evaluation. Few had training in monitoring and evaluation as part of a
youth worker's routine daily working environment rather than an
externally initiated operation.

Conclusions and implications

Youth organisations are an important part of the social worlds of young people
and tend to be positively valued by those who participate. There is evidence that
most of the five key dimensions of effective youth work identified by the
Scottish Inspectorate are being met. Young people are provided with opportunities:
- for social contact and access to places to meet their friends
- to develop new skills and take part in activities which might be outside
the financial reach of the most vulnerable young people.
- to gain useful information on personal and social issues
- to take part in decision-making and learn team work skills.

However there is some cause for concern.

- Youth workers are less successful in providing guidance and counselling.
- With young people making later transitions to the world of work, the
sharp decline in membership during early teenage years is a source of
concern. Few existing models of youth work are successful in reaching
older young people who may be vulnerable.
- Although detached youth work seemed to be effective in targeting
vulnerable older young people, many areas had no detached provision.

Is there sufficient, appropriate provision to meet the needs of vulnerable young people?

Youth work in Scotland comprises youth clubs, uniformed organisations and

voluntary agencies. They offer a wide range of programmes for young people and provide them with interesting and useful leisure pursuits, although in some areas the range is limited. Despite this variety, individuals are likely to have relatively little choice of accessible youth work provision and services for older teenagers tend to be poor. The vulnerable young people taking part in the study drew attention to the lack of guidance and counselling within mainstream youth work.

Youth workers find it difficult to make contact and provide for the most vulnerable young people and older teenagers. Given that this older group encounters a greater range of risks (such as use of drugs, alcohol and involvement in illegal activities), this is a serious short-coming .

Are the outcomes clearly monitored and evaluated?

The impact of youth work on vulnerability is difficult to verify as the many apparently positive outcomes from youth clubs and activities are not being monitored and evaluated.

Evaluation priorities focus largely on levels of usage. Specific issues are rarely targeted until they are identified as problematic. Accountability is often limited to an assessment of resource deployment rather than representing an attempt to measure outcomes, evaluate effectiveness or explore alternative models.

Significantly, the least trained workers probably have most direct contact with young people but the diversity in qualifications and training suggests that it is likely to be difficult to develop general and systematic evaluation strategies.

Are there ways in which resources could be targeted more effectively?

There is a such a wide range in the scale of budgets that it is impossible to make direct comparisons on the costs of services. Such costs have to take into account the immense contribution from volunteers without whom much provision would collapse.

Most funding is fixed term.

Lack of certainty especially in community education results in:
- too much time being spent on chasing additional funds which reduces direct contact with young people
- reluctance to experiment and prioritise maintenance of provision.

To what extent can youth work succeed under present funding arrangements?

Most funding is fixed term. Even when grant applications are successful, youth workers remain on the treadmill of close accountability to sustain the grant and to formulate new grant proposals to guarantee maintenance of the service.

Does youth work provision make a difference to vulnerable young people?

Vulnerable young people are under-represented in youth organisations. Cost is not necessarily the major factor. Cultural factors and local environmental issues can act as a deterrent to attendance. There is no doubt that there is insufficient detached and outreach work to make a difference to the most vulnerable young people. Such provision is expensive and it is difficult to demonstrate success other than through individual stories or through predicted costs arising from individuals unable to adjust to adulthood.

Providers of mainstream youth work value constructive activity and may find it difficult to cope with the confused or anarchic values and behaviour of some of the most vulnerable. Detached youth workers have different priorities. They usually work with clients in responsive situations involving only a small group or tailored to the specific needs of individuals.

Youth work involvement reduces the time young people spend 'hanging around' and this clearly has some impact on the reduction of vulnerability. On the other hand, young people spend a very limited time at youth clubs so the overall impact of youth groups may be diluted.

It is difficult to demonstrate success other than through individual stories...

How can providers better demonstrate their effectiveness to other people?

What are the policy implications of the findings?

There is no imperative for unitary authorities to provide any form of youth work; they are empowered only to provide it as part of the service to the community. Consequently, in times of financial restraint, youth work provision can be a soft target and the needs of vulnerable young people may be ignored. In the long term, this will be to the detriment of society as well as young people themselves.

In many areas, young people spend a lot of time 'hanging around' out of doors. Youth groups often provide a constructive alternative. Given the introduction of experimental curfews which aim to reduce the numbers of young people 'hanging around' in public places in the evening, it is important to fund the resources to provide a greater range of alternative activities for young people.

Future developments in youth work

Meeting the needs of young people today and tomorrow

- a comprehensive review of how 'old' models of youth work can help meet the needs of young people today
- the monitored development of new models of youth work appropriate to distinct needs of different age groups

- priority given to guidance and counselling within all forms of youth work
- a reconsideration of how to provide casual leisure activities and information in attractive informal settings available throughout the week.

Supporting the most vulnerable

- a comprehensive review of detached and outreach work with an assessment of the ways it meets the needs of the most vulnerable young people
- a longitudinal study of the impact of youth work in reducing risk and vulnerability.

Funding

- greater stability in long term funding to encourage providers of youth work to be more innovative and experiment with new models of youth work
- consider transferring resources from criminal justice to youth work to help reduce the long-term economic and social costs associated with crime
- additional training opportunities for voluntary and sessional workers
- a high priority to researching the implication of funding cuts and their strong impact on detached and outreach work for vulnerable young people.

Monitoring and evaluation

- the enhancement of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms as part of a strategy to provide evidence of effectiveness and thereby encourage more stability in funding arrangements for youth work
- if evaluation is seen as an increasingly important element in developing youth services then service funders, managers, and workers may have to be more involved in the development of suitable and acceptable methodologies.

Full report

The full report of *Evaluating youth work with vulnerable young people* is available, from the Scottish Council for Research in Education. 15 St John Street. Edinburgh EH8 8JR. Price on application.

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Further information

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