THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland

Citation for published version:
Fyfe, J, Biggs, H, Hunter, S, McAteer, J & Milne, D 2018, *The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland*. Youthlink Scotland, Edinburgh. <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/3183/impact-of-community-based-universal-youth-work-in-scotland-november-2018.pdf>

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 09. Oct. 2026

The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland

A study commissioned by the
Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
PLYMOUTH MARJON UNIVERSITY
YouthLink Scotland
The national agency for youth work

Acknowledgements

Authors

Dr Ian Fyfe[1] with Hannah Biggs[2], Susan Hunter[3], Dr John McAteer[4] and Dona Milne[5] with contributions from Dr Susan Cooper[6], Chris Martin[7], Mark Meechan[8] and Andy Thomas[9]

Practitioner Researchers

Shona Agnew, Fozia Ali, Willy Barr, Greg Cuthburt, Adam Donaldson, Joanne Ellis, Danielle Fitzpatrick, Louise Gray, Debbie Harvey, Patricia Kent, Ruth Kerracher, Ryan McKay, Sharon McAree Thomas, Jamie Proudfoot, Rachel Rowan, and Sarah Stow

Research Partners

University of Edinburgh, YouthLink Scotland (on behalf of the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group[10]), and University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON)

Funders

This research has been funded by NHS Health Scotland, NHS Lothian, Scottish Government, The Gannochy Trust and YouthLink Scotland, with additional contribution from organisations[11] through sectoral crowd funding.

[1] Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh
[2] Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy, University of Edinburgh
[3] YouthLink Scotland
[4] Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy, University of Edinburgh
[5] NHS Fife and Chair of Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group
[6] University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON)
[7] Callander Youth Project Trust
[8] Falkirk Council Community Learning and Development Service
[9] Citadel Youth Centre

[10] See Appendix 1a
[11] See Appendix 1b

"Well, I was a wee radge[12]…"

Female, 17

"**Well, I was a wee radge…** Getting barred and that all the time. One of the seniors asked me to go along to the senior night and I came along and it was better, more freedom. I got involved in DofE . Then I started volunteering on the night I used to get banned from. Then I was volunteering 2 nights a week. I volunteered because I enjoyed being a role model. I didn't like school. It wasn't my cup of coffee. I learned more here than I did at school, just like day to day skills. My attitude and way around things, dealing with things, I changed for the better. Well I wasn't a radge any more. I started listening to people, youth workers, cos they weren't like teachers. They were easier to have a relationship with, talk to and that.

I kept volunteering and got to know people, higher up people, made contacts. I got kicked out of school and came to a group… where I did my school work and worked one to one with a youth worker. I learned how to live in the big wide world. How to run a house and that. Well I have a job and am still highly involved in youth work. I am the chair of a youth committee we are making chances and changes for people like me."

The Youth Worker's Commentary

"She attended the P6-S1 youth group where the she was in a lot of conflict with the workers and with her peers. She had loads of ideas of activities and projects that she was interested in but it was only after… attending the senior group and she had her ideas listened to and taken seriously that she began to trust the youth workers and speak to them about why she chose to put herself at risk and gain a negative reputation in the community. This was supported through spending one to one time with her and encouraging her to take part in group activities. She had been removed from mainstream [school] and was in the process of being removed from… a school for young people with additional emotional and behavioural needs.

She was given encouragement to participate in training programmes on youth leadership and she took the lead on several community events. The youth workers provided her with opportunities to take the learning she gained from the training experiences and share it with her friends and although she never returned to 'education' she completed some of her National 4's within the youth club setting and has gone on to complete several youth awards. She was supported to start volunteering at the youth club and at one stage was volunteering four nights and one afternoon session a week. The youth workers supported her to gain a work placement and to research job opportunities that would meet her interests and skill set. She was able to access training opportunities through the club and see herself as a positive role model for other young people.

She had successfully gained full time employment several times over the past 2 years but had not managed to maintain any of the jobs. She is aware of injustices within work environments and finds herself in conflict with management with limited ability to compromise. The youth workers and her are working on looking at managing employment and the rights of an employee as well as what type of job role would suit her. She… was unable to speak up for herself now speaks in front of groups and represents other youth people giving them a voice."

[12] INFORMAL•SCOTTISH. Noun: 1.a wild, crazy, or violent person.

Foreword

Scotland's youth work sector is committed, resilient, and ambitious. It is with the support and leadership of the youth work sector that we have undertaken this research study. This report describes the findings from a piece of qualitative research undertaken with three organisations in Scotland who deliver community-based universal youth work[13].

Youth work in Scotland is going through a challenging time. A time where there is increasing focus on demonstrating outcomes whilst the sector is facing significant reductions in resources. One of the best ways to demonstrate impact is to generate evidence showing what works and what doesn't. This can help us to do more of what works and less of what doesn't. The research utilised a methodology that was consistent with the values and approach of youth work in order to capture the stories of young people about what they think they have gained from taking part in youth work.

We learn about the confidence and skills for life that young people feel they have gained from taking part in youth work, of their increased opportunities and life chances to pursue their interests and shape their future destinations. We hear about the friendships they make and the respite they receive from often challenging life circumstances.

Scotland's youth work sector is committed, resilient, and ambitious.

The research also captures the "how" of youth work. We hear about clear features of the youth club setting – a place to reduce isolation, create a sense of belonging and provide new experiences and opportunities for learning in an informal setting. Young people recognise and articulate the importance of having a trusted adult and a safe space created by youth workers with whom they often form long term relationships continuing into young adulthood.

Young people recognise the value of youth work in their local community. It might be about learning, but it isn't school. It is a partnership between young people and youth workers, an environment where they can take increasing levels of responsibility when it feels right for them. The personal development gains through youth work should not be underestimated.

This research report provides further evidence about the impact of youth work, contributing to a growing body of evidence developing in the UK. We know that youth work makes a significant contribution to the lives of young people. We need to see greater recognition of the benefits of youth work as a form of informal education that should be available to all young people in Scotland.

Dona Milne
Chair of the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group

[13] The primary concern of this research project is the impact of community-based universal youth work. Throughout this report this term is used interchangeably with youth work with no intended bias in meaning or interpretation.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a national research project that engaged with three communities in Scotland examining the impact of community-based universal youth work services, using Transformative Evaluation (Cooper, 2012). Central to the emergent data was the narrated experiences of the young people in each locality who shared their personal reflections of significant changes resulting from participation in community-based youth work. These stories of change were enrichened by including the commentary of youth workers to create co-authored significant change stories.

Findings, which emerged from the qualitative research, point to the central role and value of youth work in supporting and nurturing personal and social development for those young people engaged in the provision. Impact is identified through the following themes:

- Confidence
- Skills for life
- Equal and included
- Friendship
- Safe and well
- Able to lead and help others
- Get on well with others

A number of ways of working and features of youth work practice, relationships and environment were identified as contributing to achieving the above impacts. These were identified through the following themes:

- Trusted adult
- Providing a space to be heard
- Giving praise and encouragement
- Working effectively alongside others
- Practitioners as role models
- Long term relationship
- Negotiated learning
- Inclusive practice

Examples of change become tangible through the reflective narrative expressed in the words of young people themselves across the three communities. The impact demonstrated and the ways of working identified in this study will provide much-needed evidence to support the youth work sector to sustain and further develop as an essential professional service for Scotland's young people.

Contents

1. Introduction: Youth Work in Scotland 1

2. Context and Aims of the Study 4

3. Methodology 5

4. Findings 9

5. Conclusion 29

6. References 31

Appendices

1a: Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group 33

1b: Research Funders 34

2: Research Project Team 35

3: Transformative Evaluation (TE) Methodology 36

1. Introduction: Youth Work in Scotland

Youth work is a well-established practice within Scotland's communities that has a legacy spanning over 150 years. Following the reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, policy priorities for youth work, and broader children and youth services, across Scotland changed dramatically, and at an unprecedented pace. The devolution of discrete political powers from the UK Government to the Scottish Government has resulted in a raft of national policy priorities that embrace the potential of youth work as well as set out expectations in terms of sector performance and measurable impact on the lives of young people.

Contemporary policy drivers of youth work in Scotland include, but are not limited to:

- enhancing health and wellbeing, in particular mental health (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014; Scottish Government 2017b);
- a commitment to tackling the effects of poverty (Scottish Government, 2016a);
- enhancing school attainment for all young people (Scottish Government, 2016b, Scottish Government, 2017a);
- promoting and providing opportunities for achievement (Education Scotland, 2013);
- developing employability skills amongst the young workforce (Scottish Government, 2014);
- realising, recognising, and promoting child rights (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014); and
- focus on prevention, safer communities, equalities, and resilience (Scottish Government 2018a).

A national youth work strategy was published in 2007 (Scottish Executive, 2007) and followed up in 2014 (Education Scotland et al, 2014) with the current five-year strategy. This document sets out the common goals and practice priorities of Scotland's youth work sector. The strategy is overseen by Education Scotland, Scottish Government and the youth work sector via YouthLink Scotland, and forms the framework for the measurement of impact. Contemporary youth work in Scotland is documented in the strategy as:

> "An empowering process… one of the very few practices whose remit provides for young people to exercise genuine power – to take decisions, follow them through, and take responsibility for their consequences."
>
> **(Education Scotland et al, 2014, p.31)**

In response to the policy terrain, modern-day youth work practice has become a sophisticated profession that relies on a multi-skilled workforce (of paid staff and volunteers) possessing broad knowledge and understanding of the complex issues faced by young people in their everyday lives. The practitioner role is underpinned by national occupational standards, values, ethics, and competences (Lifelong Learning UK, 2012; CLD Standards Council, 2015; CLD Standards Council, 2017).

However, despite the combined changes over time, three longstanding principles continue to define youth work, namely; young people choosing to participate, the youth worker working alongside a young person as partners in learning; and focus for the work beginning with the experiences, needs and interests of the young person. These principles are enshrined in the *Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work* which sets out the vision for practice across the sector (YouthLink Scotland, 2005). A review of literature on universal youth work reiterates the importance in ensuring the needs of young people are paramount in planning and delivery of youth work services. The review concluded that:

> **"Universal youth work represents both a type of provision and a political commitment. As a type of provision, universal youth work is open to all young people (not targeted at particular groups), and its purpose is not pre-determined or aimed at addressing specific issues or problems as defined by policy makers."**
>
> **(EWYC/UofE 2015a, p. 75)**

Balancing the priorities of policy with the day-to-day issues faced by young people has become a perennial demand on practice. The sector continues to evolve and respond to the policy-driven expectations of the state and the aspirations of young people. The *Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work* was the platform for the recent development of a framework of practice outcomes and indicators created by and for the sector (YouthLink Scotland, 2018). These outcomes offer a framework of reference against which to plan, reflect, evaluate and identify change for young people through youth work.

The professional standing of youth work in Scotland has continued to grow and the collective sector that brings together a range of partners, local authorities and third sector, including uniformed and faith-based youth organisations, has a well-established profile. National organisations such as *YouthLink Scotland, Youth Scotland* and *Young Scot* provide invaluable support, infra-structure, and information for youth work practitioners and young people. From rather humble beginnings, modern-day youth work in Scotland now engages an estimated 385,000 young people each week, and is delivered by a workforce in excess of 80,000 including 70,000 volunteers (YouthLink Scotland, 2016). A recent report from the Scottish Government (2018b) on the participation of young people in out of school activities found that 32% participated in uniformed youth groups; 23% in democracy groups; and 21% in youth clubs.

The continued evolution of the sector has also presented some fresh challenges. Whilst the politics and related policy context of Scotland have set youth work apart from the rest of the UK, some changes to the sector have prevailed more widely (Fyfe & Moir, 2014). Progressively, youth work in Scotland is tasked with juggling the ever-changing mandate of the state through emergent policy whilst meeting the needs of young people in a climate of dwindling and competitive resources.

A challenge faced by most community-based universal youth work organisations is the increasing requirement to measure the impact of their practice. The influence over the past few decades of new public management and broader neo-liberal concerns with measurement of outcomes and impact has transformed how youth work practice across the UK and many other nation states is planned, monitored and evaluated (de St Croix, 2018). The *National Youth Work Strategy* reflects this with two of the five ambitions being to 'ensure we measure our impact' and to 'recognise the value of youth work' (Education Scotland et al, 2014). It is against this backdrop that the research presented in this report was conceived and undertaken.

2. Context and Aims of the Study

In the current context of diminishing resources and the increasing focus on measurement and performativity, the Scottish youth work sector is under unprecedented pressure to demonstrate its impact. However, evidence of the resultant long term change is often elusive. Participation in youth work is open to all but voluntary, and its curriculum emerges from a process of collective dialogue and learning which happens between young people and youth workers (YouthLink Scotland, 2005). Typically, this means that the impact of youth work is both difficult to research and emergent, only becoming apparent after prolonged periods of engagement over a number of years. This is a situation shared across many nation states in Europe and beyond.

Commissioned by Scotland's Youth Work Research Steering Group (SYWRSG), a group facilitated by YouthLink Scotland, the research presented in this report builds on the insights gleaned from an earlier literature review on universal youth work (EYWC/UofE, 2015a). The findings of the review confirmed that:

> **"Universal youth work has the potential to contribute to a range of important outcomes and achievements for young people, in particular health and wellbeing, educational attainment and employment. [That said,] the youth work sector need to be more informed about the nature and purpose of their impact through ongoing longitudinal research."**
>
> **(EYWC/UofE, 2015b, p.1)**

The literature review on universal youth work concluded there was a need for further evidence through engaging the youth work sector, including young people themselves, as active research partners. In response SYWRSG prioritised the need for contemporary qualitative research, providing an opportunity to engage youth work practitioners as trained researchers working alongside young people to record their experiences of participating in youth work. The research was made possible through the contribution of a number of funders[14]. The methodology used in the study (Transformative Evaluation) is drawn from a broader European[15] research project (Ord et al, 2018) funded through Erasmus+. The lessons learned from the established European study provided us the opportunity to design and conduct this parallel study in Scotland, a similar study has since been undertaken in Australia.

The aim of the SYWRSG research project was to explore the impact of community-based universal youth work[16] in Scotland. The project sought to answer two questions:

- 1. What is the impact of community-based universal youth work in Scotland?
- 2. How has that impact been achieved?

[14] See Appendix 1b

[15] Includes partners from England, Italy, France, Estonia and Finland – with lead coordination by the University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON).

[16] The primary concern of this research project is the impact of universal youth work. Throughout this report this term is used interchangeably with youth work with no intended bias in meaning or interpretation.

3. Methodology

[For a fuller description of the Transformative Evaluation (TE) methodology used in this research, please see Appendix 3.]

Transformative Evaluation (TE) (Cooper, 2012) offers a methodology which establishes a dialogue between young people, youth workers and stakeholders. It has twin purposes. It seeks to provide evidence of impact and to develop practice through the process of evaluation.

This methodology is consistent with the values and approach of youth work, providing an opportunity to listen to the stories of young people about what they think they have gained from taking part in youth work. It was considered to be a method which would encourage practice development:

- youth workers would receive authentic feedback from young people about how their practice has impacted on their lives;
- both youth workers and stakeholders would have an opportunity to reflect on 'what is working' and therefore improve and develop practice accordingly;
- it facilitates wider development of organisational learning and knowledge creation in the longer term; and,
- it creates a culture of evaluation built on collaboration and trust between all stakeholders which supports organisational learning and sustainable practice.

Study sites and sample

The SYWRSG selected three Scottish youth work organisations to become research sites. An open call went out to Scotland's youth work sector with organisations invited to submit an application to be involved in the research. The applications received were assessed against set criteria that reflected the research aims and were aligned with a demonstrable commitment to the principles and practice of universal youth work. Essentially, two central tenets of universal youth work were applied as a reference point in gauging the suitability of applicants, namely:

1. Universal youth work is a political commitment to universal services and welfare provision;
2. Universal youth work interventions are open, in principle, to all young people and not targeted at specific participants.

Three organisations were selected to become research partners and as such the practice sites to be studied:

- Falkirk Council, Community Learning and Development Service (Falkirk CLDS);
- Citadel Youth Centre located in Leith, Edinburgh (Citadel YC);
- Callander Youth Project Trust (Callander YPT).

These sites matched best with the selection criteria set by the SYWRSG. Taken together they also typically reflect the diverse nature of the broader youth work sector in Scotland, which comprises state-sponsored organisations across the 32 local government areas, and an array of voluntary/third sector organisations. Existing youth workers from Falkirk CLDS, Citadel YC and Callander YPT were trained in the TE methodology to become Practitioner Researchers and gathered stories from within their existing youth work provision. Table 1, provides a profile of the participating organisations.

Table 1: Organisation Profiles

Sector	Public Body / Local Government	Voluntary / Charitable Sector	Voluntary / Charitable Sector
Indicative age range of young people accessing services	8-25	5-21	11-25
Location	Urban (with some rural provision)	Urban	Rural
Funding sources	Local Authority (LA)	Grant funded (mix of LA and charitable)	Combined grant funded, social enterprise income and commissioned work (LA and employability)
Type of work	Open access universal youth work provision in three sites.	Open access (centre-based) and targeted youth work (schools and centre based). Family support and intergenerational work.	Open access (centre-based), targeted (1:1 & group work), employability support.
Number of Practitioner Researchers	6	6	5
Number and Description of Participating Stakeholders	6 stakeholders: including local authority officers, senior third sector managers, and health board officer	8 stakeholders: including professional colleagues, community volunteers, ex-service users and parents/carers	6 stakeholders: including local authority officers, secondary head teacher, local politician

Data collection

Data were collected in three continuous cycles over an 11 month period by Practitioner Researchers. In each cycle, different young people were identified to participate in the research. This decision was made by the Practitioner Researchers and was based on their perception that the young person had experienced a change arising from their engagement in youth work provision. The Practitioner Researchers then engaged with the young people through their everyday practice, with a view to collecting significant change stories. These stories consisted of both the young person's perspective and that of the practitioner. The anonymised stories were uploaded by the Practitioner Researchers to a central database.

Analysis

Coding is an analytical process which helps to make sense of the stories which had been generated. Coding for this project involved reading the stories to identify emerging trends, patterns and common themes. Throughout the coding, great care was taken to ensure that the voice of the young person remained central to the analysis of the stories.

There were three phases to the coding process, with a view to identifying a set of 'impact codes' and a set of 'practice codes' (how that impact was achieved):

- During **phase 1**, stories were coded by six members of the research team with youth work expertise: 3 youth work managers and 3 youth work research/policy practitioners. This occurred over two days during a workshop facilitated by two further members of the research team, and involved coding of stories from cycles 1, 2 and 3, and then agreement on an initial set of final codes.
- During **phase 2**, one of the researchers read through all cycle 1, 2 and 3 stories and checked to see whether there was data in each story to justify each code generated in phase 1. The researcher highlighted any codes where it was unclear whether there was sufficient evidence for the suggested code. The researcher also highlighted data to support additional codes that were not picked up in phase 1.
- In **phase 3** a final set of codes were agreed. Two members of the research team checked all proposed additional codes and any queried codes presented by the researcher from phase 2. The research team agreed the final codes for cycles 1, 2 and 3 and once the final codes for each story were agreed, the researcher created an Excel spreadsheet to input the data and also uploaded all stories into qualitative analysis software (NVivo) to capture the supporting data for each code. The quotes included in this report are a sample of those chosen to illustrate the codes.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the study was granted by The University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON). The partnership between the SYWRSG and colleagues from MARJON was detailed in a Memorandum of Agreement between University of Edinburgh and Plymouth MARJON.

Limitations of the study

The selection of the sites was undertaken rigorously with the intention to recruit research partners that demonstrated a commitment to the principles and practice of universal youth work. The respective organisations engaged in the research were regarded as being typical of the sector in Scotland. However, with such a small number of sites any wider generalisability of the findings beyond the three localities is limited.

It is acknowledged there was potential for bias in the sampling of the young people who participated. Central to the TE approach are the stories of change narrated by the young people who took part. Mainly, the Practitioner Researchers selected young people with whom they had an existing relationship. Hence, they potentially held pre-existing knowledge of their experience in the youth work setting. A fuller discussion of the sampling method is provided in Appendix 3.

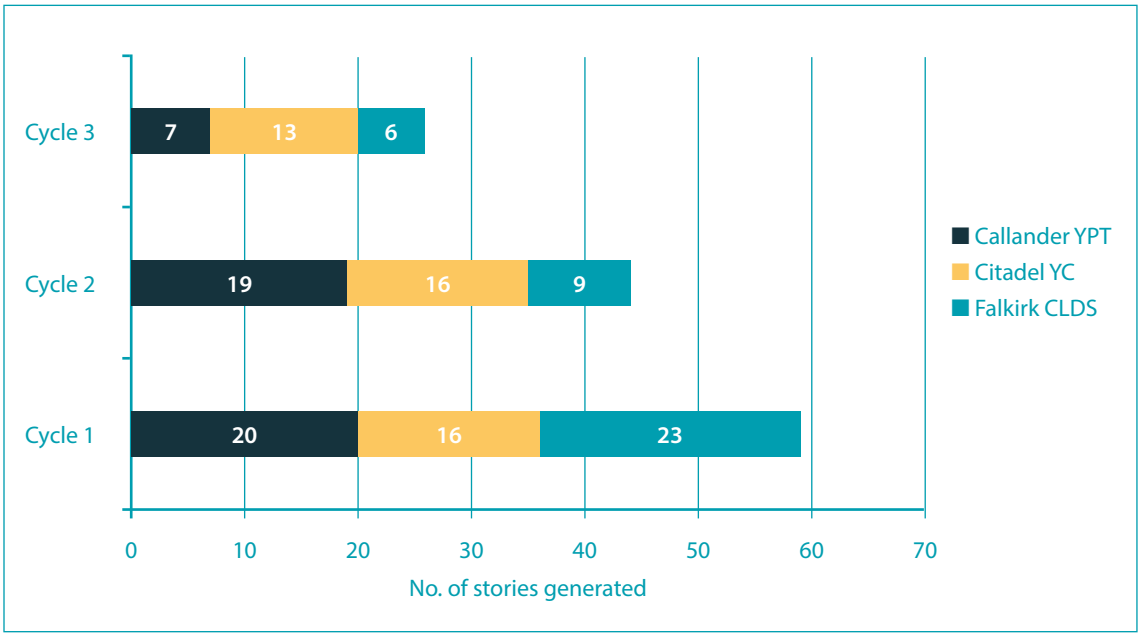
The dialogue between young people and Practitioner Researcher was primarily concerned with personal development and change which is illustrated through the stories gathered. Therefore, there is dedicated focus in the data analysis, coding and presentation of findings related to individualised forms of impact pertaining to the young people, rather than to collective change within communities or wider society, which was less evident.

4. Findings

4.1 The impact of community-based universal youth work: analysis of stories

In total, 129 stories were generated by the three youth work organisations (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Generation of stories in Scotland by organisation and cycle



The largest number of stories (n=59) were generated in cycle 1 overall and across all three projects. The least number of stories were generated in cycle 3 both overall (n=26) and across all three projects. Callander YPT generated the most stories (n=46) followed closely by the Citadel YC (n=45). Falkirk CLDS generated marginally less stories (n=38).

In each cycle Significant Change Stories were discussed by the Practitioner Researchers, and from these a number were selected as Contextualised Significant Change Stories. From this smaller number, they were presented to the Stakeholder Group[17]. Table 2 shows the number of stories presented and then selected at each stage.

[17] Stakeholder Groups were specific to each of the three sites. Their membership is shown in Table 1. Description of their purpose is included in Appendix 3.

Table 2: Number of Story Types generated by cycle

Story Type	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Total
Significant Change Stories (total number of stories collected)	59	44	26	129
Contextualised Significant Change Stories (total number of stories selected by the Practitioner Researchers and presented to the Stakeholder Groups)	11	9	8	28
Most Significant Change Stories (number of stories selected by the Stakeholder Groups)	3	3	3	9

In each cycle, each Stakeholder Group selected one Most Significant Change story, resulting in nine Most Significant Change Stories being identified from the 129 stories collected.

Across all sites the average number of codes per story was 7.9 (Table 3).

Table 3: Average number of codes per story

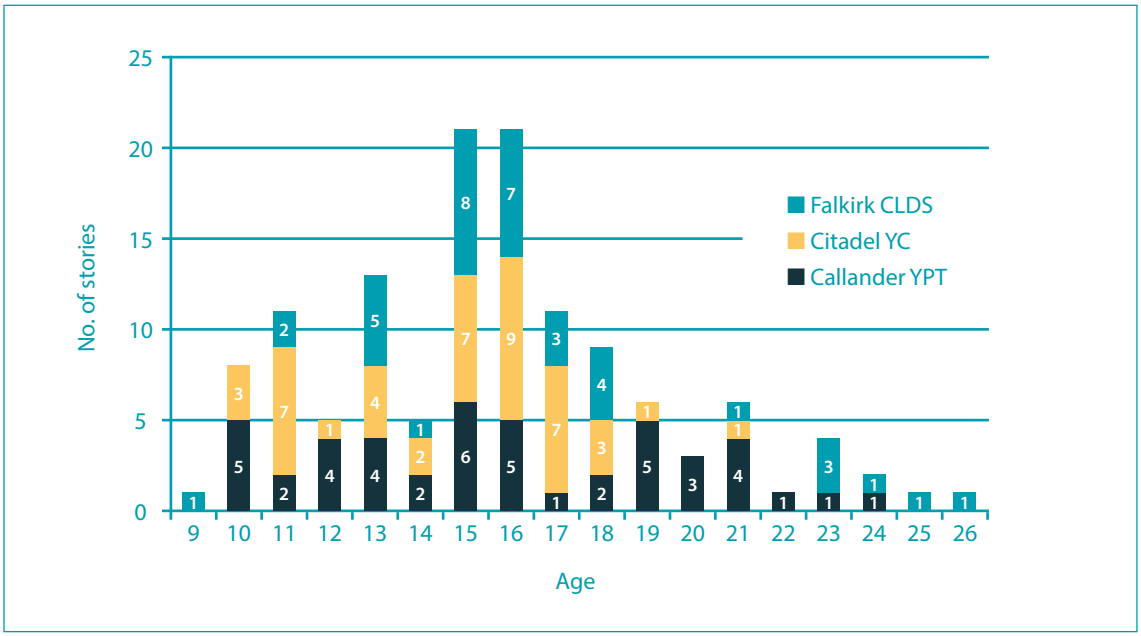
Site	Average no. impact codes per story	Average no. of practice codes per story	Average no. of total codes per story
Callander YPT	4.3	3.2	**7.5**
Citadel YC	3.8	3	**6.8**
Falkirk CLDS	4.8	4.5	**9.3**
Across all sites	4.3	3.6	**7.9**

Falkirk CLDS averaged the most codes per story (n=9.3) and Citadel YC averaged the least (6.8). Across all three sites there were marginally more impact codes (n=4.3) per story than practice codes (n=3.6).

Age of participating young people

Significant Change Stories were generated by young people aged 9 to 26 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Story generation across age

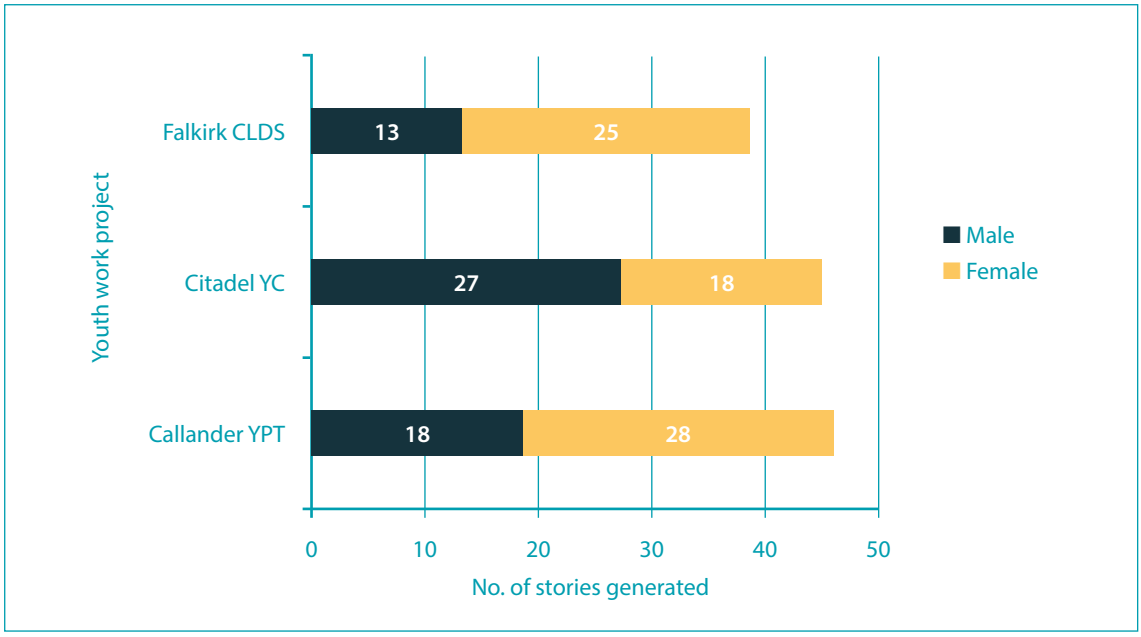


The majority of stories were generated by young people of secondary school age, 11-18 (n=96), with those aged 15 and 16 (n=21) generating the most stories, followed by age 13 (n=13), 11 (n=11) and 17 (n=11).

Gender of participating young people

Slightly more Significant Change Stories were generated overall by young females (55%) than with young males (45%) as shown in Figure 3. The young people were asked to identify their gender to the Practitioner Researcher, the centrally held database only allowed for binary identities Male or Female to be recorded. It is not known how many, if any, young people may have chosen a different gender identity had this option been available in the recording system.

Figure 3: Story Generation by Gender



Both Falkirk CLDS (n=25, 66%) and Callander YPT (n=28, 61%) had more stories generated by females than males. Only Citadel YC had more stories generated by males (n=27, 60%) than female.

4.2 Community-based universal youth work: description of impact codes

As described in Chapter 3 (methodology), cycle 1 stories were analysed to identify an initial set of codes. This initial set of code was then applied to the stories from cycle 2 and cycle 3 and any additional codes were added to the list. The codes were amended and adapted as necessary and the initial codes were then combined to create a higher level 'final code' (as shown in Tables 4 and 5). There were a final set of impact codes and a final set of practice codes produced.

Table 4: Initial and final set of impact codes

Initial Impact Codes (from cycle 1)	Additional Impact Codes (from cycle 2 & 3)	Final Impact Codes	Total no. of initial Impact Codes per final code	Total no. of stories in which final code is present
Confidence (n=83) Self worth (n=20) Sense of identity (n=6)	Maturity (n=18)	**Confidence**	127	93 (72%)
Employability (n=46) Life skills (n=34) Accreditation (n=32)	Successful transitions (n=3)	**Skills for life**	115	74 (56%)
Reduced isolation (n=32) New experience (n=32) Belonging (n=17)		**Equal and included**	81	68 (53%)
Friendship (n=60)		**Friendship**	60	60 (46%)
Safer behaviour (n=26) Health & wellbeing (n=20) Respite (n=12)		**Safe and well**	58	50 (39%)
Leadership skills (n=26) Responsibility (n=19) Community participation (n=13)		**Able to lead and help others**	58	45 (35%)
Social skills (n=43) Improved relationships with adults (n=7) Respect for others (n=3)		**Get on well with others**	53	51 (40%)

Twenty-one initial impact codes were generated, 19 in cycle 1 and two in cycle 2. The most frequent initial impact code was confidence (n=83), followed by friendship (n=60), employability (n=46) and social skills (n=43).

From the 21 initial impact codes, a set of seven final impact codes were agreed by the research team: confidence, skills for life, equal and included, friendship, safe and well, able to lead and help others and get on well with others. The final code with the most initial impact codes was *confidence* (n=127) followed by *skills for life* (n=115), respectively appearing in 72% and 56% of all the stories generated.

This section describes each impact code with the inclusion of relevant quotes (numbered Q1, Q2 etc.). Many codes are interconnected. It is therefore important to consider them alongside one another, as part of a coherent whole.

The quotes are taken from the stories, co-authored by the young person and the Practitioner Researcher. In this section the quotes are attributed to either the young person, or to the youth worker (Practitioner Researcher) depending on which part of the story the quote is taken from. The quotes of youth workers and the young person standalone from each other; with the exception of the instances when they are from the same story and this shown within the text below as an associated quote.

Confidence

The data collected from the stories emphasised the impact of youth work on a young person's psychological wellbeing, specifically confidence (Q1-4). This had direct benefits in the form of tangible improvements to the young person's life, both in the short term (e.g. performance at school) and the long term (e.g. career impacts). Young people reported more confidence, particularly in relation to communication with peers and adult figures, to develop friendships, to develop existing skills/abilities and the confidence to try new experiences. This was also reflected in the youth worker commentary. This sense of confidence was tied up with increases in self-worth. Youth work provided young people with opportunities to maximise their potential, through involvement in activities whereby they regained or further developed a sense of value in themselves. Together, these positive influences contributed to the development of a positive identity.

> "Over the years they [youth workers] have given me the confidence to try new things and try go out my comfort zone. One of these times was when I attempted to go for the army, she was supportive throughout. When I got the call that I was declined, I cried and she was there for me, she helped me be more confident and loves me for who I am."

Q1. Female, 18

> "His confidence really has grown, he used to barely speak and was really shy but he is so relaxed when he is in the [project] now. He has taken on opportunities and even though he found them really difficult, like his DofE hillwalking expeditions, he still finished them which shows how far he has come since he started coming here."

Q2. Youth Worker

> Youth work definitely gave me a sense of confidence that I didn't have before, for example applying for college courses, and attending interviews."

Q3. Female, 21

> [Young Person] started volunteering at the project when she was only 16 years old… with the support of the youth workers her confidence began to grow and grow… The skills she had learned from the youth workers during her time volunteering has helped her become a confident, caring, kind young lady with a great… career ahead of her."

Q4. Youth Worker

Skills for life

The overall evidence from the study confirmed that participation in youth work is important for acquiring and developing skills for life (Q5-8). Skills for life are defined here as practical, life-enhancing skills, such as those acquired through formal qualifications (both educational and otherwise, e.g. driving licence), work experience, life experience and accredited/achievement awards. Skills for life were closely linked to the tailored nature of youth work, in particular the identification of strengths and interests suited to each young person, enabling appropriate matched opportunities. Many accounts directly linked the skills developed through youth work with vocational destinations and career aspirations. The opportunities engaged with through youth work (e.g. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award or participation in new experiences) allowed the young people to build confidence to pursue their interests, shaping their future destinations.

> I was lazy, never wanted to leave my room or socialise with my friends. Then I got involved with my local youth project where I received a job. This helped me massively in many aspects of my life… I have now moved on to full time job within my local community and owe a lot of what I've just said to my youth project."

Q5. Male, 19

> [He] was able to pass his driving test with the help of the project which gave him a new sense of freedom… [his] youth worker encouraged him to take on more supervisory roles. [He] excelled in this position. [He] was then encouraged by his youth worker to do his Modern Apprentice… [He] completed this with no problems. [He] has now moved on to a job within the local community and is thriving."

Q6. Youth Worker

> the biggest thing that we done was my Bronze Youth Achievement Award… I gained lots of skills from taking part and in these things I learned things about myself that I didn't know. The whole youth club experience was the best along with meeting new people and gaining skills that I could use further on in life."

Q7. Female, 16 [associated to Q8]

> On completion of her Bronze Youth Achievement, [she] then moved onto participating in Duke of Edinburgh's Award with the school, we feel that without the camping / cycling / canoeing experience that [she] would not have believed in herself, however with these newly learned transferable skills, she felt confident enough to go ahead and try. Throughout this time we have witnessed [young person] go on and start her Silver Youth Achievement where she organised charity fundraisers for her community."

Q8. Youth Worker [associated to Q7]

Equal and included

Universal youth work is typified by the youth club setting that was identified in the young people's stories as a place where they felt a sense of belonging, reduced isolation and included in opportunities to get involved in several new experiences (Q9-14). The youth club was also described by the young people as a safe space for them to be themselves, allowing them to develop their interests and identities amongst peers in a supportive environment. The provision of such a space led to impacts in other areas of their lives, with many participants reporting that contact with the youth club environment changed them in socially positive ways. Young people who felt excluded elsewhere or isolated, grew in confidence, developing friendships outside of the youth club environment, e.g. school and local communities. Some of the young people described the youth club as their family.

> If I didn't come along to the youth club I would be sitting in my house playing video games and not thinking about anyone else… I feel accepted here, not out in public or in the school."

Q9. Male, 15

> I got kicked out school because they thought being there I was putting everyone there in danger the teachers hated me, they just wouldn't listen. They listen to me here and I don't think they would boot me out."

Q10. Female, 16

> I liked coming here because it was a lot cheaper and it was easier for me. I knew more of the kids because they are from the same area as me. The youth workers understand about my learning difficulties. They always support me but allow me freedom as well."

Q12. Male, 23 [associated to Q13]

> [Young person] originally came along as a young person to the youth club and has ended up staying as a volunteer. He has learning difficulties that have played a part in him not getting employment after leaving high school and have impacted on his socialising skills. By coming to the youth club and building his confidence and social skills he now feels very much part of the club."

Q13. Youth Worker [associated to Q12]

> … the family were socially isolated and did not have any social connections in the community. [She] had very little social interactions with children outside of school and found it very difficult to negotiate the formal classroom environment. … She has begun to form more consistent relationships with children and now refers to them as her friends. [She] has even attended a residential… which has been an amazing achievement for her."

Q14. Youth Worker

Friendship

Our research found that the participants recognised the youth club as a place to build positive, supportive relationships with their peers (Q15-18). Such friendships were critical to the development of social skills. Some of the youth work participants stated they felt better equipped to make friends in other contexts, e.g. high school. Many close and meaningful friendships were described in the data. These were characterised by supportiveness, encouragement and positive experiences. Often, friendships were forged and strengthened through taking part in activities and achieving together. The ability to sustain friendships was often cited as an additional impact. The stories gathered highlighted that some young people had experienced difficulties in socialising prior to taking part in youth work and reported a positive change as a result.

> My friends all came here. I get the chance to hang around with my friends, and I convince them to come along to youth club. Sometimes I met new friends."

Q15. Female, 15

> Since joining senior youth club she has gained a close friendship with having the time to socialise herself and not being on the constant look out for her siblings. The friendships she has established are that of very close ones which help her be more confident and show more independence when socialising. She no longer seeks solitude."

Q16. Youth Worker

> [Young person] began as a volunteer in youth club. She lacked in confidence and was more accustomed with supporting and leaning on her friend to help make any and all decisions. With both her and this friend at youth club, we had to directly support [her] to integrate with others in the group. She now has many new friends – friends that she previously avoided in school due to her lack of confidence. While her and her friend are still extremely close – she now does not rely on this friend so much. Initially a shy young woman, she has developed her own identity and own self."

Q17. Youth Worker

> I have so much new friends in [project] and it has allowed me to make friends better within school as I was not as shy."

Q18. Female, 14

Safe and well

It became clear from the evidence gathered that the youth work setting is a place of respite and hence a catalyst for improvements in health and wellbeing. Also, the research demonstrated that youth work enables behavioural change in some young people displaying behaviour detrimental to themselves or those around them (Q19-22). Participation in youth work was linked to improvements in health and wellbeing. Including: building self-confidence (e.g. skills, social aptitude); increasing ability to deal with difficult emotions (e.g. grief, anger); and managing risky behaviours, (e.g. self-harm). Some young people reported issues with anger and fighting prior to participation in youth work, with clearly stated improvements. A number of young people shared experiences of challenging home circumstances, e.g. caring responsibilities at home. Youth work provided an opportunity for these young people to step away from such circumstances to recharge, talk about any challenges and importantly, to be themselves. In such cases, the youth workers often played an essential role in sign-posting the young person towards appropriate additional services. Many of the participants described the youth club as a place to escape from pressures elsewhere, for example school or home. As a result, young people were able to grow through engagement in the opportunities and relationships available to them in youth work.

> [Project] has changed me a lot. A lot has happened to me and my family. Basically [family member] passed away and I had a major fall out with my friends. I felt like I had no one that listened to me. I was very sad and had very sad thoughts for a while. So I tried to self-harm. I showed people what I wanted to do to myself… I took a video and took pictures… [Project] helped me because they helped me have friends and be part of games. I now think my life is perfect just the way it is."

Q19. Female, 10

> There are rules at youth club which makes me feel safe and the youth workers are trustworthy so I feel I can go talk to them."

Q20. Male, 13

> I would be like doing drugs and drinking, being a right good toe rag. But I started volunteering and I had to show the wee ones how to be a good role model. … now I feel I have changed for the better… the youth workers didn't force me to change but they pointed me in the right direction and supported me when I needed it. Back in fourth year I was smoking outside the school and stuff and wasn't allowed to be a prefect but now I got told I'm like the most changed pupil or something like that."

Q21. Female, 16

> [Young person] was initially very body conscious and rarely took a lead role in activities. Following completing the programme, [his] confidence and self-esteem greatly improved. We were also made aware of the caring responsibilities he had at home for both his parents, something his school were unaware of. As a result of this new information, we were able to signpost [him] to a respite care service for young carers."

Q22. Youth Worker

Able to lead and help others

Evidence of impact gleaned from the young people's stories confirmed that participation in youth work contributes to their development as responsible, active citizens, with young people taking on leadership opportunities both within the youth work environment and elsewhere (Q23-28). These leadership and community participation roles often took the form of representing young people and the issues affecting them, either through local means (youth forums, etc) or wider national forums (e.g. Scottish Youth Parliament). Others had taken on more of an informal advocacy role through participation in youth work, providing peer support within their respective youth clubs and/or acting as role models. A common theme was that of responsibility, a quality reported in the stories which most attributed directly to participation in youth work.

> We had space to hang out and the organised activities encouraged participation. I became the chair of the Youth Forum which gave me a lot of responsibility and I even got to go to the big trustees meetings to tell them what we were thinking."

Q23. Female, 15 [associated to Q24]

> [Young person] chaired our Youth Forum for two years. She was voted in by her peers and I remember noting this was a significant moment in her life because she was low in confidence and suffered with a low self-image. [She] grew into the role and developed leadership skills and naturally took a lead in some of the activities… The group grew individually as well as collectively and we saw a positive change over the four years she engaged with us. [She] is a leader among her peers now and people seek her out; she is nurturing by nature and models some of the behaviour she saw modelled in the youth workers."

Q24. Youth Worker [associated to Q23]

> [Young person] has become an advocate for less confident young people and has established strong bonds with youth workers and other volunteers."

Q25. Youth Worker

> I got elected for the Scottish Youth Parliament. This has been great for my confidence and has given me the chance to meet a whole new friendship group because of that."

Q26. Female, 15

> [Young person] was given encouragement to participate in training programmes on youth leadership and she took the lead on several community events. The youth workers provided [her] with opportunities to take the learning she gained from the training experiences and share it with her friends… and [she] sees herself as a positive role model for other young people."

Q27. Youth Worker

> Off his own back, [he] began organising peer led lessons for several participants and decided that he wanted to firm up his commitment and become a volunteer within the project. His passion for [project] is obvious and the value of his role within the project is immeasurable."

Q28. Youth Worker

Get on well with others

Increased social skills and improved interpersonal relationships were frequently recorded across the stories (Q29-33). Participating in youth work was commonly recognised to contribute towards the building of social skills, which once developed were applied in other areas of the young person's life, e.g. school, home. Some of the young people also described improvements in relationships with adults, including teachers, youth work staff, and family members. This closely ties into friendship, with young people expressing the ability to both make and sustain supportive and meaningful friendships with their peers and others. Developing this attribute is also closely linked to acquiring skills for life with young people reporting that they were able to use communication skills in other contexts such as to apply for jobs. The young people also stated that they had developed the qualities of being non-judgemental and having respect for others.

> "To begin with she was a very shy child and in avoidance of interaction with most other children. The opportunities of taking part in activities has enabled her to gain confidence in socialising."

Q29. Youth Worker

> "I'm calmer than I was before I used to shout at everyone. My relationship with staff and other children has got better and I tell people if I'm annoyed now."

Q30. Female, 13

> "[Young person's] mother worked closely with the [worker] to discuss [his] secondary school options and made use of the [worker] to support her relationship with [his] school. Last year, [project] supported [young person] and his mother to apply for a short break, with [young person] and his mother reporting that this was a brilliant experience which helped them to strengthen their relationship."

Q31. Youth Worker

> "Youthy made me better mannered, like when I see teachers or youth workers on the street I go up to them and say hi."

Q32. Male, 13

> "[He] has changed a lot even in the last 2 and half years that I have known him. [He] has always been quite impulsive, which got him into a lot of trouble at home and at school, but he has really matured in the last year and has really managed to control his temper and his impulsiveness."

Q33. Youth Worker

4.3 Community-based universal youth work: description of practice codes

In this section, we turn attention to the nature and purpose of youth work. It became apparent from the emergent data that discrete aspects of youth work practice and relationship were highlighted as key to achieving the impact and these were recorded as practice codes. This data provides invaluable evidence of how the practice, approaches and underlying principles of contemporary youth work in Scotland affect change in the lives and lifestyles of young people.

Seventeen initial practice codes were generated, 16 in cycle 1 and one in cycle 2 (Table 5).

Table 5: Initial and final set of practice codes

Initial Practice Codes (from cycle 1)	Additional Practice Codes (from cycle 2&3)	Final Practice Codes	Total no. of initial Practice Codes per final code	Total no. of stories in which final code is present
Learning and development opportunities (n=61) Facilitated activities (n=43) Volunteering (n=38) Recreational activities (n=25) Leadership opportunities (n=22) Received peer mentoring (n=1)		**What we do:** Intervention and structured opportunities	190	110 (85%)
Trusted adult (n=45) Being heard (n=38) Praise and encouragement (n=19) Community networks (n=13) Access to positive role models (n=4)	Identifying and meeting individual needs (n=17)	**How we do it:** Practitioner attributes and approach	136	78 (60%)
Long term relationship with youth work (n=58) Safe space (n=36) Inclusive (n=20) Building on strengths and interests (n=15) Negotiated learning (n=7)		**Principles:** The raison d'être of practice	136	93 (72%)

The most frequent initial practice code was learning and development opportunities (n=61), followed by long term relationship with youth work (n=58), trusted adult (n=45) and facilitated activities (n=43). Receiving peer mentoring was mentioned only once and access to positive role models, four times. From the 17 initial practice codes, a set of three final practice codes were agreed by the group: what we do, how we do it and underlying principles. The final code with the most initial practice codes was *What we do* (n=190). *How we do it* and *Principles* both had the same number of initial codes (n=136).

Here we present a more detailed analysis and discussion of the practice codes with examples of illustrative quotes from the data relevant to the respective initial codes. Similar to the presentation of the impact codes, these should be read and understood as interconnected. As such, the short extracts merely summarise what in some cases was a complex practice intervention. The codes capture the diversity of the sector and universal youth work practice more specifically, as well as offering insight to the raft of methods and approaches youth work practitioners employ in their work with young people.

What we do: intervention and structured activities

The impact of youth work articulated in the stories often reflected a deliberate intervention on the part of the practitioners. These interventions included the provision of learning and development opportunities, facilitated activities and recreational activities (Q34-35) that were often tailored to the young person's needs, strengths and interests. Volunteering and leadership opportunities, including peer mentoring, were commonly offered to young people. Through engaging in these opportunities and activities, young people and youth workers reported the acquisition of confidence and skills, and development of meaningful friendships. For many, this opened doors to future opportunities, as evidenced by the stories. Several accounts described the progressive journey taken by the young people as they engaged with different forms of provision, encouraged and supported at each stage by the youth workers.

> "The group were given the opportunity to sing live on stage, for which they separated into solo acts, bands and duos, [young person] took the challenge with great pride and it was a privilege to see her perform. This opportunity really opened the door for [her] as she confidently decided that she would like to complete a Bronze Youth Achievement Award and continued for the next 2 years actively participating in learning opportunities and realising her potential."

Q34. Youth Worker

> "This young person was referred to us through his school and he has only worked with us for less than a year. Since then he has taken on loads of opportunities and attends up to four of our clubs or groups in one week, as well as volunteering in one of the clubs for younger kids."

Q35. Youth Worker

How we do it: practitioner attributes and approaches

The skills base of the youth worker is multifaceted and the broad demand of their role requires a comprehensive knowledge of the issues affecting young people. Central to the practitioner identity are a range of professional attributes and personal characteristics. These in turn are complemented by ensuring a distinctive setting in which youth work takes place (Q36-40). Examples from the stories of positive impacts achieved through participation in youth work were reported to be through meaningful relationships with a trusted adult, provision of a space to be heard, receiving praise and encouragement, and access to community networks and role models.

Trusted adult

Many of the young people spoke about their recognition of the youth worker as a trusted adult or the agency more generally as a trusted organisation. The practitioner in question provided the young person with a point of contact for advice and support, in addition to offering praise and encouragement. The youth worker was often aware of the young person's circumstances and needs and was able to provide help and support in relation to specific issues, problems or queries that they had. In some cases, the youth worker was the only trusted adult presence in the young person's life.

> "Whilst volunteering I went through a significant change in my late teen life by coming out as a gay man which I wasn't completely prepared for as I had only just realised/accepted it myself and wasn't sure how it was going to affect my life as I knew it. But yet again to my side were the workers that I knew and trusted who helped me through any issues that I had, anything that was concerning me and put me through to people who could help when they could not."

Q36. Male, 23

Providing a space to be heard

The youth work setting offered many young people a place of sanctuary where they knew they would be listened to. The importance of this being a consistent feature of both the setting and the practitioner response was evident in several of the stories.

> "Youth workers allow me to have a chance to talk, I know if I was upset the youth workers would help me."

Q37. Female, 10

Giving praise and encouragement

Several of the participants engaged in this study had experienced complex challenges and change in their lives. For some, participation in youth work was ever-present and for others they had been periodic attenders at different stages in their lives. What was apparent from many of the stories was the value of the youth worker being non-judgmental and a consistent source of encouragement and support.

> “[Young person] attended the P6-S1 youth group where the she was in a lot of conflict with the workers and with their peers. [She] had loads of ideas of activities and projects that that she was interested in but it was only after [she] had been attending the senior group and had her ideas listened to and taken seriously that she began to trust the youth workers and speak to them about why she chose to put herself at risk and gain a negative reputation in the community. This was supported through spending one to one time with her and encouraging her to take part in group activities.”

Q38. Youth Worker

Working effectively alongside others

Some of the stories illustrated the ability of youth workers to work together with family members, other professionals and organisations involved in the young person’s lives (e.g schools, social workers, parents). These relationships and practice partnerships helped to form a strong community network and establish foundations for change.

> “[Young person] has received sustained support since 2014 from a succession of different youth workers at the Project, and I personally have been working with her over the past year. [She] has been in and out of care since she was born… [She] has benefitted tremendously from a support network that has included youth workers, social workers and foster parents, and the positive ways in which these different groups have worked together: she thinks that these interventions have stopped her from ending up living on the streets again – she is calmer, more approachable and confident, and is more comfortable in social situations. She is now working with the Project gaining valuable experience and is showing a wonderful work ethic and dedication.”

Q39. Youth Worker

Practitioners as role models

What became apparent from the stories was that young people view youth workers as role models in their lives. From the youth worker perspective, this is a deliberate mode of practice that helps build relationships and complements the relevant planned activity and programme content.

> "[Young person] was a concern to us when she first engaged at youth club. Through role modelling and building up positive relationships [she] was able to work through some issues in her home life. She knew that we were there for her and she could talk through what was going on. [She] has developed into an amazing young woman, heading off to do voluntary work [overseas] for a part of the summer holidays. She articulates that much of the confidence she has gained came from the activities engaged with at youth club. She has a close knit group of friends who have spent at least four years engaging with universal youth work opportunities and I personally have seen a positive change in her. She is now a positive role model for the younger kids and quickly grew out of the attention seeking behaviours she was exhibiting as a child. Our youth work practitioners have always been encouraged to role model positive behaviour and the girls group that we ran encouraged them to look at issues such as image, self-harm and bullying."

Q40. Youth Worker

Principles: the raison d'être of practice

Through the analysis of stories a number of principles (Q41-46) were identified as underpinning youth work practice. These principles included the need to foster supportive and nurturing long term relationships with young people, provision of a safe space and culture of inclusivity, and the importance of negotiated learning building on strengths and interests of young people.

Long term relationship

A key finding of our study was the impact of long term relationships developed in the youth work setting. A significant number of the young people involved in this research had been engaged with youth work for a considerable number of years. Youth Workers in turn had fostered long term supportive and nurturing relationships with the young people resulting in positive impacts over the course of many years. In some cases, this led to demonstrable long term change such as positive career choices and accreditation.

> "I started coming here when I was 5 or 6 years old and we used to go to the [youth work service]. It gave me the chance to get off the streets and my Mum was glad that it kept me out of trouble. It also gave me the opportunity to get a RUTS Motolearn Bike qualification. I am now applying to join the army."

Q41. Male, 15

> [Young person] started attending the service when he was very young and could be a boisterous and at times volatile young man as a result of his ADHD which he found extremely difficult to manage. However he still engaged well with staff during this time. Over the last couple of years we have not only seen [him] make the transition in to the Senior Club but have also seen a huge positive change occur in him, his motivation, commitment and his abilities to keep calm."

Q42. Youth Worker

Negotiated learning

Negotiated learning that built on the strengths and interests of the young people was another evident principle underpinning youth work practice. The provision of choice through optional and tailored programmes of activities was central to the achievement of various outcomes, including accreditation, confidence and general wellbeing. In some cases, the focused nature of the learning relationship provided young people with access to dedicated and specific expert support with identified learning needs.

> We offered [young person] the opportunity to complete her Bronze Youth Achievement Award, and it was through this that we discovered that [she] was dyslexic. We used integrated literacy strategies in the work that we completed with [her] and encouraged her to use the PC rather than hand written as this was a real issue for her. [She] excelled with the completion of youth achievement evidence by using the PC and successfully gained her Bronze Youth Achievement."

Q43. Youth Worker

> A one to one session creating a personal development profile helped [young person] decide what it was that she hoped to achieve so that her activities could be based around this. Although low in confidence [she] had a desire to learn how to sing and so took part in an informal singing group with like minded young people every week. [She] soon became a very different young person, happy, confident and enthusiastic, her input to the group sessions were valued by her peers and she was very supportive of new or less confident members."

Q44. Youth Worker

Inclusive practice

Inclusivity is a core principle underpinning the youth work approach and was evident across the three sites within this study. The universal youth work setting was seen as providing a safe space for all. This closely aligned with the sense of belonging felt by young people. The provision of such a safe and nurturing space is central to the positive development of the young person.

> "I come to the older youth club and I also come down and chill in the youth space and use the Wi-Fi as I don't have Wi-Fi in my house. I really feel safe in youth clubs. Unlike school. Everyone accepts me for who I am here, and I like that."

Q45. Female, 13

> "[Young person] moved here with her family 2 and a half years ago. It would be fair to say that although they are settling in well, there are still teething issues… [She] often comes to youth club. She is quiet and she finds it a safe space and a comfortable environment for her. We often see her and her other family members here a lot at the youth project on days out with provision. They stay here for hours and utilise the space. This is a nurturing environment and we have seen her develop her confidence more within the space."

Q46. Youth Worker

5. Conclusion

In this research study, we set out to investigate the impact of universal community-based youth work in Scotland. The findings of our study not only captures the impact of universal youth work but also highlights what youth work practitioners do to achieve positive outcomes for young people. A range of outcomes were evident in the data, gathered in the form of Significant Change Stories from 129 young people participating in youth work provision across three selected sites. The collective evidence produced findings grounded in the reflective experiences of young people with additional observations from youth workers. It is clear from these stories that young people value community-based universal youth work as a place to build confidence and develop friendship. They recognise the importance of their relationships with youth workers, who they view as trusted adults, that respect and listen to them, and who create opportunities for informal learning leading to the development of confidence and life skills.

The local youth work organisations featured in this study were uniformly recognised as inclusive, friendly, fun and safe environments that offer young people opportunities to express themselves and provide new experiences to learn and develop through structured educational and leisure activities. There is consistent recognition from the young people across the three sites that the acquisition of certain knowledge and skills through their experiences has helped to develop their potential as future leaders. The research highlighted the impact of youth work as a vehicle to harness the ambition and ability of young people through opportunities for undertaking voluntary work and leadership roles in the youth work setting. However, across the 3 sites studied examples of young people becoming collectively active in their local communities was less evident. In practice, the vision of youth work in these localities as an empowering process appears to fall short in terms of wider community action and change led by young people.

The research highlighted the impact of youth work as a vehicle to harness the ambition and ability of young people

The Transformative Evaluation (TE) approach utilised a research methodology that complemented the youth work practice. This has worked well. The method was embraced by the projects involved and has demonstrated that integrating research into practice can be a useful tool for improving practice and in turn delivering quality youth work in Scotland. Indeed, the three organisations who took part in the research are already adapting their practices in response to findings. The data collection was young people focussed and the fieldwork participative. Gathering of the stories was achieved by the dedicated youth work practitioners who had been trained to undertake the face-to-face investigation. The cyclical nature of the TE model promoted reflective practice amongst the practitioners, wider agency staff and stakeholders. As an approach to investigation TE offered an opportunity to consider not just youth work's impact, but the mechanisms by which that impact is achieved.

Much has been learned from our research about the impact of universal youth work that offers detailed insight to the purpose, process and setting of practice. Examples of impact gathered through the recorded stories resonate with the desired outcomes of the policy landscape currently shaping youth work in Scotland. That said the findings of this research offers new insight to the impact of community-based universal youth work practice in addressing the needs of young people in Scotland. There is a challenge emerging from this research for funders, policy makers and stakeholders to reassess what counts as evidence. This study makes an important contribution to the understanding and evidence of how youth work achieves significant change for young people.

6. References

Cooper, S. (2012) *Transformative Evaluation: An interpretive study of Youth workers' experience of using participatory evaluation, Doctoral Thesis*. Available at: **https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/3759** (Accessed: 21 November 2018)

Cooper, S. (2014) Putting collective reflective dialogue at the heart of the evaluation process. In *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 15 (5), pp.563-578

Cooper, S. (2018) *Participatory evaluation in youth & community work*. Oxon: Routledge

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Available at: **http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/8/contents/enacted** (Accessed: 18 October 2018)

CLD Standards Council (2015) *A Code of Ethics Learning Resource: Ethical Practice Competent Practitioner*. Glasgow: CLD Standards Council for Scotland

CLD Standards Council (2017) *A Code of Ethics for Community Learning and Development*. Glasgow: CLD Standards Council for Scotland

de St. Croix, T (2018) Youth work, performativity and the new youth impact agenda: getting paid for numbers? *Journal of Education* Policy, Vol . 33, No. 3, pp. 414–438. **https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1372637** (Accessed: 29 October 2018)

Eoyang, G. and Berkas, T. (1999) Evaluating Performance in a Complex Adaptive System. In M. Lissack, and H. Gunz, H. (Eds.) *Managing Complexity in Organizations: A View in Many Directions*, pp. 313-316. Westport, Connecticut: Quorum Books

EWYC/UofE (2015a) *Universal Youth Work a Critical Review of the Literature Edinburgh, Youth Work Consortium and The University Of Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh. Available at: **https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/1112/youth-work-literature-review-final-may-2015.pdf** (Accessed: 29 October 2018)

EYWC/UofE (2015b) *Universal Youth Work a Critical Review of the Literature Summary Report Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium and The University Of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh. Available at: **https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/2237/universal-youth-work-a-critical-review-of-the-literature-summary.pdf** (Accessed: 29 October 2018)

Education Scotland (2013) *CfE Briefing 10: The role of Community Learning and Development and partnership working*. Livingston: Education Scotland

Education Scotland, Scottish Government, YouthLink Scotland (2014) *Our ambitions for improving the life chances of young people in Scotland, National Youth Work Strategy 2014-2019*. Livingston: Education Scotland

Fyfe & Moir (2014) Standing at the Crossroads – What future for Youth Work? In *Concept Youth Work Reader*. Edinburgh: Concept, pp. 1-13 **http://concept.lib.ed.ac.uk/article/view/2362/3482** (Accessed: 26 October 2018)

Guijt, I. and Gaventa, J. (1998) *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation. IDS Policy Briefing 12*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. Available online at **https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/PB12.pdf** (Accessed: 10 March 2016)

Ord et al (2018) *The Impact of Youth Work in Europe: A Study of Five European Countries*. Helsinki: Humak University of Applied Sciences

Lifelong Learning UK (2012) *Youth Work National Occupational Standards*. Available at: **http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/National-Occupation-Standards-for-Youth-Work.pdf** (Accessed: 18 October 2018)

Mertens, D. (2009) *Transformative Research and Evaluation*. New York: Guilford

Scottish Executive (2007) *Moving Forward: a Strategy for Improving Young People's Chances through Youth Work*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

Scottish Government (2014) *Developing the young workforce: Scotland's youth employment strategy*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2016a) *Fairer Scotland Action Plan*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2016b) *Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2017a) *2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan for Scottish Education*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2017b) *Mental Health Strategy 2017-27*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2018a) National Performance Framework. Available at: **http://nationalperformance.gov.scot/** (Accessed: 18 October 2018)

Scottish Government (2018b) *Young people's participation in out of school activities: research findings*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Stake, R. (2004) *Evaluating in Practice*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd

YouthLink Scotland (2005) *Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work*. Edinburgh: YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland (2016) *Youth Work Changes Lives – A Prospectus*. Edinburgh: YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland (2018) *Youth Work Outcomes*. Available at: **https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/policy/youth-work-outcomes/** (Accessed: 18 October 2018)

Zandee, D. and Cooperrider, D. (2008) Appreciable worlds, inspired inquiry. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (Eds) *Handbook of Action Research* (2nd edition) pp. 190-198. London: Sage Publications

Appendix 1a: Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group

Group Remit

The Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group (SYWRSG) was established in 2015 to further the interests and needs of research in the youth work sector in Scotland. This group has emerged to fulfil a need identified in the *National Youth Work Strategy* and to further momentum which was gathered through the publication of *Universal Youth Work: A Critical Review of the Literature*.

The work of this group contributes to the *National Youth Work Strategy*, and in particular to:

- Ambition C: Recognise the Value of Youth Work
- Ambition E: Ensure we Measure our Impact

The Group oversees the development of a national programme of youth work research.

The SYWRSG committed to progress an academic research route to meet the needs of the youth work sector and to conduct the activities listed below.

a. Mapping of existing youth work research (2005-present) and host this on **www.youthlinkscotland.org**
b. Create and implement a national programme of youth work research
    i. Identify funding routes and make appropriate applications for financial investment in to youth work research
    ii. Commission youth work research as appropriate
    iii. Identify and share emerging youth work research with the sector
    iv. Disseminate published research
c. Identify youth work research gaps, including emerging needs of the youth work sector and liaise with academic institutions and funders to explore opportunities for these needs to be met
d. Be informed of national research which impacts upon the youth work sector, and seek to influence its development or dissemination
e. Inform and report on progress of the SYWRSG to the National Youth Work Strategy Stakeholder Reference Group.

Group Membership:

Over the past 3 years membership of the group has evolved and grown. Current membership includes representation from:

CLD Standards Council, Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium, Education Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, Lothian Association of Youth Clubs, NHS Fife, NHS Health Scotland, Scottish Government, University of Dundee, University of Edinburgh, University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, YMCA Scotland, Youth Scotland, and YouthLink Scotland.

Group Contact:

Susan Hunter, Senior Development Officer, YouthLink Scotland **info@youthlinkscotland.org**

Appendix 1b: Research Funders

- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Lothian
- Scottish Government
- The Gannochy Trust
- YouthLink Scotland

With additional contribution through sectoral crowd funding:

- Citadel Youth Centre
- CLD Standards Council
- Dame Sue Bruce DBE
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scotland
- East Ayrshire Council
- Improvement Service
- LGBT Youth Scotland
- NHS Western Isles
- North Ayrshire Council
- Scottish Youth Parliament
- The Boys' Brigade
- The Prince's Trust Scotland
- YMCA Scotland
- YouthBorders

Appendix 2: Research Project Team

The research project team comprised, in alphabetical order:

Name	Organisation/Institution
Emily Beever	YouthLink Scotland
Hannah Biggs	University of Edinburgh
Dr Susan Cooper	University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON)
Dr Ian Fyfe	University of Edinburgh
Susan Hunter	YouthLink Scotland
Chris Martin	Callander Youth Project Trust
Dr John McAteer	University of Edinburgh
Mark Meechan	Falkirk Council Community Learning and Development Service
Dona Milne	NHS Fife (previously NHS Lothian)
Prof Jon Ord	University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON)
Andy Thomas	Citadel Youth Centre

Appendix 3: Transformative Evaluation (TE) Methodology[18]

The data collection was shaped by the conceptual model of Transformative Evaluation which is a participatory evaluation method developed in 2010 through a doctoral research project based in a voluntary sector youth work organisation in England (Cooper, 2012; Cooper, 2018). It is theoretically informed by three essential aspects: the transformative paradigm, appreciative inquiry and participatory evaluation.

- The influence of the **transformative paradigm** can be seen in the inclusion of marginalised groups (in this case young people, youth workers and community members) in the evaluation process (Mertens, 2009). Importantly, working within a transformative paradigm allows evaluation to become a part of the youth work intervention and enables it to be used as a reinforcing rather than discouraging feedback mechanism (Eoyang and Berkas, 1999).

- **Appreciative inquiry** is based on the theoretical framework of positive psychology. As such it is a strength-based approach explicitly taking a positive stance in an effort to counterbalance the deficit discourse of problem-solving (Zandee and Cooperrider, 2008). Essentially, appreciative inquiry focuses on strengths rather than deficits within a given community or practice setting. The purpose is to increase our understanding of 'what works' so we can do more of it.

- **Participatory evaluation** can be understood as a process of collective action that involves a range of stakeholders in reflection, negotiation, collaboration and knowledge creation. Importantly participatory evaluation is not simply a matter of using participatory techniques, it is about rethinking who initiates and undertakes the process and who learns or benefits from the findings (Guijt and Gaventa, 1998).

Drawing on these theoretical foundations, Transformative Evaluation offers a methodology which establishes a dialogue between young people, youth workers and stakeholders. It has twin purposes; it seeks to provide evidence of impact and to develop practice through the process of evaluation.

Practice development occurs on a variety of levels. Firstly, in 'real time' youth workers receive authentic feedback from young people about how their practice has impacted on their lives. Secondly, both youth workers and stakeholders have an opportunity to reflect on 'what is working' and therefore improve and develop practice accordingly. Finally Transformative Evaluation facilitates wider development of organisational learning and knowledge creation in the longer term. It creates a culture of evaluation built on collaboration and trust between all stakeholders which supports organisational learning and sustainable practice.

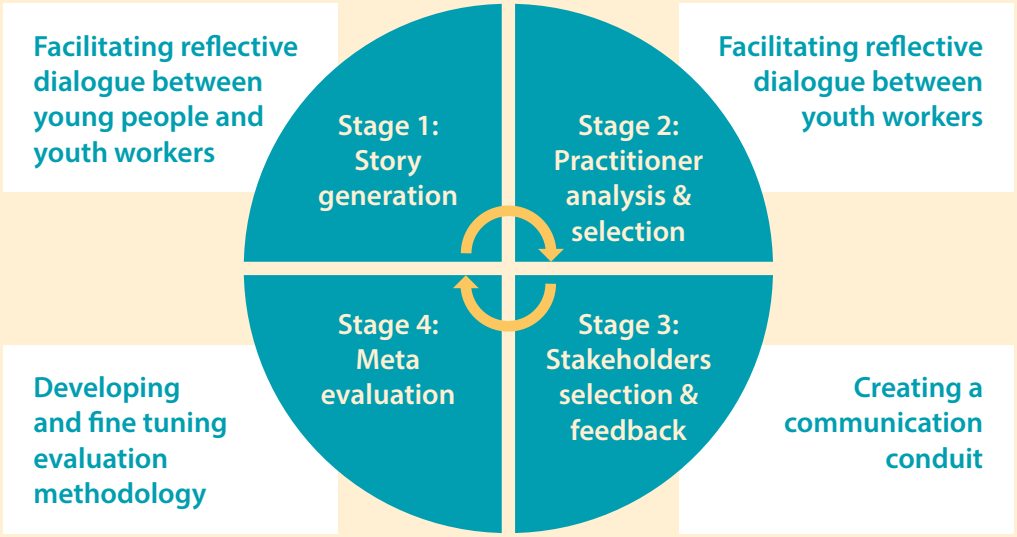
[18] This text has been kindly reproduced and adapted with the permission of Dr Susan Cooper.

The Transformative Evaluation (TE) Model

Transformative Evaluation is based on the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique in that it involves the generation of Significant Change stories during a given time period and the systematic collective analysis of those stories. A key difference in Transformative Evaluation is that the significant change stories are co-authored, as young people and youth workers are both positioned as 'story-tellers'. Young People identify what they perceive to be an important outcome and the youth workers' narratives provides the reader with a description of the youth work process that contributed to the achievement of that outcome.

TE follows a four stage process which is generally repeated every three to four months, each time with a new cohort of young people.

These stages are shown in the diagram below, and described beneath:



(Cooper, 2014)

STAGE 1 involves youth workers generating Significant Change stories with young people. These are collected by youth workers who engage young people in conversation, beginning with the following question as a prompt: ***'Looking back, what do you think has been the most significant change that occurred for you as a result of coming here?'*** The young person is encouraged to explain why the change was significant to them and this promotes reflective dialogue between the young person and the youth worker. The stories are recorded by the youth workers using the young people's own words.

STAGE 2 involves a process of collective analysis and selection of the young people's significant change stories. This can be a challenging part of the process but is rich in learning for the youth workers involved. This stage has three steps:

- *Step 1* involves the youth workers sorting the stories into groups (domains). This process of sorting and assigning domain names leads to reflection and in-depth analysis.
- *Step 2* begins the process of co-authorship. The youth workers add context and professional commentary to the young person's story that they collected. Engagement in reflective dialogue with peers about their understanding of the young person's story and their intervention supports them to do this. This process promotes learning amongst the group of youth workers about the significant changes taking place in the lives of young people as a result of being involved in youth work.
- *Step 3* requires the group to reach consensus on the story that is the best example of youth work outcome for each domain. This promotes shared visioning and team work. The reason for selection is added to each story and the selected stories are then presented to the stakeholder group. These co-authored stories are termed 'Contextualised Significant Change stories' (CSCs).

STAGE 3 involves the stakeholders group. This group generally consists of three to five members who have a 'stake' in youth work but who are not directly involved in the delivery. The identification and recruitment of the best people to be involved in this group is important and requires some consideration. The stakeholder group receive the selected contextualised significant change story from each domain and it is their task to discuss, review and select the 'Most Significant Change Story' for that cycle. The cycle is completed by the return of the chosen story to the youth workers' group together with the stakeholder group's collective reason for selecting that particular story.

STAGE 4 involves a process of meta-evaluation. This is often seen as an additional external study to authenticate the process or product of an evaluation. In Transformative Evaluation it is used as a process of informal reviewing during the evaluation (Stake, 2004). Reviewing the experience of those involved in the evaluation (the young people, youth workers and stakeholders) can identify any concerns about the methodology that need to be discussed. Additionally, this stage supports the development of skills and deepens understanding of Transformative Evaluation to inform the next cycle of the evaluation.

From Theory to Practice

Following selection of the three research sites, the youth work practitioners involved from Falkirk CLDS, Citadel YC and Callander YPT together with some members of SYWRSG were invited to participate in a day-long training programme held in Edinburgh and facilitated by Dr Cooper. The interactive sessions took the youth workers through the respective stages of the TE process. The discussions focused on sample stories from previous studies that had adopted the method. Training sessions were also provided to the respective members of the stakeholder groups in each locality by Dr Cooper.

The goals of the training programme were two-fold. First, to ensure the research team, including the Practitioner Researchers were all aware of how the process was designed to work and second to encourage 'rollout' of the method to other professional practitioners and partner agencies in each of the 3 local communities.

Prior to the first stage of the data collection detailed above, the primary task for the Practitioner Researchers was to sample young people from within their local open-access youth work provision. TE adopts a Purposive Sampling method whereby the young people are selected based on prior knowledge of the practitioners that they have experienced a change arising from their engagement in the youth work provision. A fuller discussion on the nuances of utilising Purposive Sampling in the TE approach is available in Cooper (2014). The full research team discussed the importance of engaging young people through their 'everyday' practice. In other words, the planned conversations that support the generation of the relevant significant change stories were to be introduced and captured within the youth work setting, rather than a pre-organised research interview situation. The youth workers recorded stories, typically using a notebook to record key points, before typing this up and reflecting the story back to the young person to reach agreement that the young person's story had been captured accurately. In some cases the young person also provided a written story to the Practitioner Researcher. This process of recording the story could take place over a number of youth work sessions.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by The University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON). The partnership between the SYWRSG and colleagues from MARJON was detailed in a Memorandum of Agreement between University of Edinburgh and MARJON.

A research team was established which comprised members of SYWRSG working alongside senior practitioners from the partner agencies. The membership of the research team is detailed in Appendix 2. Ongoing support was available from Dr Cooper who visited each locality at the end of cycle 1 to offer further guidance on issues arising during implementation of the process. At the end of cycle 2 and cycle 3 the project sites met with Dr Cooper (cycle 2) and with Prof Ord (cycle 3) who facilitated Stage 2 of the Transformative Evaluation process. Where possible, a member of the SYWRSG attended each of the stakeholder meetings (Stage 3) as an observer to the process. The three cycles of data collection were undertaken between March 2017 and January 2018.

The stories were uploaded by the Practitioner Researchers to a central database established by Plymouth MARJON. The stories were thematically grouped using Domain Names and flagged with related key words to help identify emerging trends in the data.

Story Coding

Coding is a process which helps to make sense of the stories which had been generated. Coding for this project involved reading the stories to identify emerging trends, patterns and common themes. Throughout the analysis, great care was taken to ensure that the voice of the young person remained central to the analysis of the stories. There were three phases to the coding process, with a view to identifying a set of impact codes and a set of practice codes (how that impact was achieved).

- During phase 1, stories were coded by six members of the research team with youth work expertise: 3 youth work managers[19] and 3 youth work research/policy practitioners[20]. This occurred over two days during a workshop facilitated by two further members[21] of the research team, and involved coding of stories from cycles 1, 2 and 3, and agreement on a final set of codes. This work was completed in April 2018.

DAY 1: Coding cycle 1 stories

The coding of cycle 1 stories began as a whole group process. The following instructions were given by the facilitators to the six youth work specialists to code each story:

"As a group:

- Read the story.
- Discuss each story in relation to the question 'What is the story telling us about the impact of youth work?'
- Agree initial code(s) for each emerging theme. (Codes can be refined throughout cycle one).
- Write each initial code on the A3 story provided and on a blank card to stick on the posterboard. One code per card.
- Highlight any parts of the story (on the A3 sheet) that illustrates each initial code identified.
- Repeat for each story in cycle 1.
- Once all stories from cycle 1 have been completed, as a group review all initial codes. This is the last chance to refine any of the codes."

In coding each story, the group were asked to consider both what the impact was and for whom. For each story, the facilitators added new codes to a poster board and kept a tally of the number of times the code was mentioned throughout cycle 1. All codes were also documented on A3 size hardcopies of the stories for cross checking.

[19] CM, MM, AT

[20] DM, SH, IF

[21] JM, HB

This process was undertaken as a full group until the number of new codes being produced was approaching saturation. This occurred after 13 stories. For the remaining cycle 1 stories, the group split into three pairs. Each youth work manager was paired with a youth work research/policy practitioner. The stories allocated to the pairs were organised so youth work managers were not coding stories generated from their project. This was to ensure that coding was based only on the stories and not influenced by further knowledge of the young person who contributed to the story. At intervals, the facilitator brought the group back together to discuss any additional codes to be added. Any suggested additional code had to be agreed by the whole group.

At the end of day one all cycle 1 stories had been coded and the wording for initial codes identified were agreed by the whole group. Cycle 2 and 3 stories were allocated to each pair (again ensuring that youth work managers were not coding stories generated by their own project) in preparation for day two. All pairs were asked to read through all allocated stories in preparation for day two.

The second day of coding took place a week later. In the first half of the day the same process for cycle 1 was repeated for cycle 2 and 3 in pairs. At the end of cycle 2, the facilitator brought the full group together to discuss and agree any additional codes before proceeding to cycle 3.

DAY 2: Group agreement of final set of codes

Once the cycle 1, 2, and 3 stories were coded, a set of initial codes had been generated. The facilitator wrote each code on a separate bit of card. To agree a set of final codes JM facilitated the whole group through a clustering process, which is outlined below:

"As a group:

- **Look at all the initial codes that have been developed for the cycle 1, 2 and 3 stories.**
- **Consider if any of these are linked or similar.**
- **Move the codes around and cluster codes based on similarity.**
- **For each group agree a name / title. This will produce a final set of codes.**
- **Define each code and select illustrative quotes".**

By the end of day two, all cycle 2 and 3 stories had been coded and the group agreed a final set of impact codes and a final set of practice codes.

- During Phase 2, one of the researcher[22] read through all cycle 1, 2 and 3 stories and checked to see whether there was data in each story to justify each code generated in phase 1. The researcher highlighted any codes where it was unclear whether there was sufficient evidence for the suggested code. The researcher also highlighted data to support additional codes that were not picked up in phase 1 coding.

  For accuracy and ease of analysis, all coding was inputted into an Excel spreadsheet. This enabled the accurate counting of codes across each story, each youth work project and overall.

- Phase 3 involved agreeing a final set of codes, two members of the research team checked all proposed additional codes and any queried codes presented by the researcher from Phase 2. The research team agreed the final codes for cycles 1, 3 and 3. Once the final codes for each story were agreed, the researcher[23] updated the Excel spreadsheet and inputted all stories into Nvivo[24] to capture the supporting data for each code. Quotes were chosen to illustrate each code generated.

[22] HB

[23] HB

[24] NVIVO is a data management and analysis software programme

YouthLink Scotland (November 2018)

YouthLink Scotland is a company limited by guarantee.

Registered in Scotland No: 164547. Charity Ref: SC003923

Email: **info@youthlinkscotland.org**

Web: **www.youthlinkscotland.org**

Investors in Diversity

Design by www.graphics.coop