

Rotherham Youth Service and Partners. September 2011.

Positive for Youth – a response.

The Positive for Youth discussion papers are comprehensive yet daunting in scale in terms of a response. This particular response originated in the local authority Youth Service and includes contributions from a range of partners in different sectors. Rotherham was one of the 9, CWDC Young People's Workforce Development IYSS (Integrated Youth Support Service) pilots. The steering group leads for this programme from the public and voluntary sector have contributed here. The response offers what Rotherham sees as a positive way of working with young people and it includes current examples of practice.

Some workers have also responded on an individual basis.

A separate consultation will take place with young people.

Is there anything missing from the vision?

Does this vision capture what it would look like if the whole of society, not just public services, was positive for youth?

If we achieved our aims would society be positive for all young people? If not, why not?

Some young people are fortunate in their life chances and have a greater chance of fulfilling their potential than others. Offering good opportunities to young people and developing supportive relationships with them, we believe, fosters strong ambitions. This vision indeed captures a sense of what a society would look like if it is positive for youth, however we believe that for all young people to succeed there has to be a significant investment of public funds in all the services concerned with young people. The emphasis and prioritisation in this paper of 'learning', 'teaching,' 'education' and 'teachers' is interesting, as is the way the statements are ordered. Whilst these are all valid and necessary points, the vision appears to provide a limited rather than broad view of how education can be delivered. Many of the young people with less chance of fulfilling their potential relate to "other professionals" before teachers because "other professionals" are concerned with the young person holistically helping to remove the barriers. This is essential to success in learning. As one youth worker involved in our consultation noted:

"The 'zeitgeist' for the majority of young people that we work with and their families and communities is one largely of despair (resulting from increasingly elitist education and the lack of jobs, rampant consumerism and loss of identity and 3rd and 4th generation family breakdown.) There needs to be a more joined-up approach so that youth workers (and others in the young people's workforce) complement wider policy- driven work on:

- Eliminating poverty
- Less elitist education
- Family cohesion
- Alternatives to mass consumerism."

We have concerns that whilst acknowledging issues for some young people, the future of young people's success is too reliant in these discussion papers on the role of schools and teachers. This is our experience in practice as well. Some young people and their families have a difficult relationship with school and we are concerned that this emphasis will lead schools not to value the tremendous contributions made to young people's lives by others in the voluntary and community, public and private sector. We note the Pupil Premium that will provide schools with extra funding to spend on interventions to boost the attainment of pupils from deprived backgrounds however we are disappointed if that money is used narrowly. Some young people will not 'achieve GCSEs in vital academic subjects' unless they are supported by other members of the young people's workforce. We need the government to play a role in promoting the benefits of sharing economic resources such as Pupil Premium with other community based services, valuing the young people's workforce as defined in these papers and exploring the use of different approaches and methodologies in supporting **all** young people to achieve to their potential.

Do you agree with the vision and narrative set out in this document and the individual themed discussion papers? Are there gaps? Does the evidence point to a different approach in any area?

1. Much of the content of the discussion papers is in line with our experience. Through a CWDC pilot many members of the young people's (IYSS) workforce in Rotherham are on a path towards integrated working and developing strong partnerships, sharing expertise and resources. In Rotherham we recognise that all sections of the young people's workforce must work collaboratively and we agree a vision sets out a common purpose, shared values and a call to action. Currently through the IYSS workforce development steering group we are calling for young people, parents, communities and the young people's workforce to join us on a mission to devise a plan for a local youth strategy. We agree a good education is beneficial but there are many barriers facing young people that limit success. (Government Policy development in regard to Disabled Young People makes no suggestion that there is a life outside of school.)

We agree that a solid investment of public funds is necessary to ensure access to quality social and personal development opportunities delivered by a range of providers from all sectors outside of school. We are concerned that in some schools PSHE is offered in the form of occasional 'drop down' days and topics like domestic violence are covered by outside agencies as a one off lesson. There is little follow-up and no context within the curriculum.

In contrast to a piecemeal approach, Rotherham's One Town One Community initiative reached its second anniversary in 2011. Over the last year, more Council services, partners and community groups have become involved in this campaign that promotes the shared values that unite people in Rotherham. A wide variety of activities have tackled cohesion and integration issues and built resilience within a range of communities and groups. One Town One Community was devised by Cllr Mahroof Hussain MBE, Cabinet Member for Community Development, Equality and Young People's Issues. The initiative brought

together work to promote community cohesion, engagement, Prevent (Preventing Violent Extremism) and equalities.

As part of this the Youth Service delivered a number of successful projects over the last 2 years, involving over 1000 young people from diverse backgrounds.

Examples of work that can foster good relations between people from different groups particularly when funding is available include:

- Over 140 young people participating in a residential at Crowden and at Habershon House, Filey. These have brought together young people from many diverse backgrounds from across Rotherham Borough, including young people from Slovakia, Latvia, Afghanistan, Iraq and also included Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans young people. The residential work was organised as a result of tensions between young people and youth workers who did preparatory work with them to ensure that cohesion outcomes were achieved as planned. One example of success is improved relations between the Maltings Youth Centre and nearby Madrassa; youth workers and the head of the Madrassa are working together to combat anti social behaviour issues in the wider community.
- 25 young men have undertaken a variety of positive activities within the area of Wellgate. Reports of anti social behaviour have improved and there is better dialogue between young people, Police and Youth Workers.
- Over 250 young people received the nationally accredited outcome entitled “working together”.
- A safe space for Muslim young people to affirm their identity and participate in new opportunities. Young people have fed back that this has been a life changing experience for them in reclaiming their identity. Single gender Muslims Faith Study Circles were delivered to 80 young people.
- 57 young people attended the BME Conference.
- Members of Rotherham Youth Cabinet visited Beth Shalom, Krakow and Auschwitz. As a result of this experience, the young people delivered peer education at a Holocaust Memorial event and shared their learning at Rotherham Young People’s Conference.
- Cast Offs Youth Theatre Group performed their play “Queen Bibi” at Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Performances at a Rotherham School to audience numbers of 300 took place locally.
- 55 young people attended a Black History Month.
- 263 young people from Youth Groups across the Borough attended GW Theatre performances of their play “One Extreme to Another”, developed as part of the Government’s national Prevent programme. The play tackles religious, racial and political extremism. It has also been delivered to 7 schools and 2 youth centres. The play explores issues of violent extremism and cohesion.
- 62 young people attended a presentation at Chislett Youth Centre to share their learning from their projects. Young people mixed socially

at the event listened to others' view points, barriers were broken down and friendships formed. This event has led to the young people requesting further opportunities to meet.

- Over 40 employees have received training to deliver the 'What is British' programme and curriculum packs have been disseminated to all youth service units. A greater number of youth workers are now carrying out 'Anti Racist Work' with young people and combating far right politically influenced violent extremism.

(Work delivered to young people from the voluntary and community sector is equally impressive and reports outlining all achievements are available on request. Much of this work is delivered through the 35 members of the voluntary sector Children, Young People and Families Consortium that enables a coordinated response to developing and delivering quality partnership opportunities.)

Another example of good practice in equality and diversity in practice which could be further disseminated is the work of the Youth Service group for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people (LGB). Young people in Rotherham who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, or who are questioning their sexuality, are benefiting from the support and advice offered at a weekly youth club, held locally. Three part-time staff work within the project supporting 13-19-year-olds throughout the Rotherham area. Ofsted inspectors who assessed Rotherham's Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Service in July 2010 praised the project saying: "The lesbian, gay and bisexual group meet in a safe, confidential space and receive the support they need to help them keep safe. The service has helped to increase self-esteem for these young people who are now involved in staff interviews and give presentations and help to raise awareness in schools, colleges and at conferences."

Led by an experienced and qualified Youth Worker, with enthusiastic input from its members, the youth group meets on one evening each week to spend time together and eat a hot meal which the young people take in turns to cook. The Youth Worker says: "The aim is to provide a safe, supportive space for the young people where they can build up their self-esteem, deal with issues such as homelessness, and learn practical life skills such as cooking. We distribute leaflets and posters to secondary schools and youth clubs throughout the area with a contact number for anyone who is interested, but we keep the meeting venue confidential to ensure the young people are not targeted."

The group provides a focus for young people to discuss their needs with others who understand what they may be going through, as well as working on challenges designed to raise self esteem. Members' needs often include homelessness, sexual health and dealing with homophobic bullying. The Youth Worker says: "We concentrate on sexual and mental health issues. Over the past couple of years, I have been able to support two young people who were showing suicidal tendencies and many others who struggle with low self-esteem because of the stigma that is still attached to being gay."

The leaders have established strong links with local voluntary sector homelessness projects including Rush House and Action Housing, enabling them to give desperate young people access to the help they need. Many young people are made homeless as a result of a breakdown in family relationships after they reveal their sexuality. The group also carries out partnership work with teachers, parents and Connexions to support young people and help them achieve their potential. Several members have taken up Level 1 courses or apprenticeships.

The project has accessed NHS funding to support its healthy eating programme, which is particularly valuable because of the high number of members who are homeless and as a result, do not have access to regular hot meals. The task of cooking has been set up as a fun competition in the style of the TV show 'Come Dine With Me' in which teams work together to produce the weekly meal and other members then give scores and constructive feedback.

Further funding was obtained from the 'Quids In' project (Rotherham Youth Opportunities Fund 2009/10) following a bid presented by the young people. This enabled the group to recruit its third member of staff and to buy new sofas and other furniture for its meeting place, which was then repainted by the group members. Some of the young people were included on the interview panel for a new staff member, and the group members have also been working on new publicity material. They maintain relationships with other young people through Rotherham Youth Service, and invited young people from across the borough to join them on the Nottingham Pride march.

In addition to providing support within the group and in one-to-one meetings with members, Youth Workers work with several secondary schools in Rotherham to support young people who are subject to homophobic bullying. The group's next project will be to expand its peer education work, training members who are 18 or over to go into schools and explain the devastating effect homophobic bullying can have. Youth Workers say: "Although we have been able to achieve a lot as a group, the important thing is to deal with each person as an individual and help them to access the services they need, and to ensure they are treated in an equal and anti-oppressive manner."

(More information is available through contact with the Project on 07748 143280 or 01709 821523. The group can also be found on Facebook by searching for 'Rotherham LGB Youth Group.')

2. In Rotherham we want to devise a long-term policy that encourages and strengthens collaborative working in Rotherham. We want to provide the widest, best offer possible to Rotherham young people. There are many groups who require particular support and we operate specific, separate provision based on need. However we are careful to plan this in a fair and open way so that we do not set groups against each other.

We want to retain the Local Authority Youth Service as a hub that can support youth policy development, building on years of experience and training and strengthen our links and partnerships across sectors. There is a worrying trend, due to the economic reductions, that organisations are retreating back into

themselves. The environment is competitive for scarce resources as applications to pilot the NCS demonstrated. Having made such positive strides in recent times we do not want to go backwards at this point.

What more should be done to improve support and services for young people aged 13-19? Ideas which avoid additional pressures on public spending or regulatory requirements are particularly welcome.

1. We believe the NCS is putting additional pressure on public spending. The opportunities NCS promotes are available to many young people in Rotherham through existing provision (residential experience, volunteering, community based projects, community cohesion work.) We are concerned that NCS will take money away from what is already working well. A consortium of organisations working with young people headed by Voluntary Action Rotherham and including the local authority Youth Service, a Social Enterprise and organisations from the voluntary and community sector submitted a viable bid for the 2012 pilot which was rejected at the second stage. A number of organisations spent significant time preparing this bid and provisionally booking venues. We know this would have delivered successful outcomes with and for young people, yet we felt frustrated that we had wasted valuable time and were left disappointed when our bid was rejected.

2. We agree that public perceptions and expectations of young people must change if we are to achieve this **Positive for Youth** vision. In Rotherham we have examples of work with young people that attempts to reverse negative stereotypes. The Lookagain Project is one example of many where positive images of young people challenge the negative perspectives held by some adults in the community. A youth worker explained "Young people wanted adults to look again at what they are really doing." A participant on the project said, "Young people are stereotyped in such a way that people think that all teenagers are bad." Rotherham Young People Power, produced in spring 2011, is a 16 page magazine widely distributed across Rotherham packed with over 20 good news articles featuring young people. Funded by the Target Support Fund through the Yorkshire and Humber Empowerment Partnership, the purpose is to promote the active involvement of Rotherham citizens in their local communities. Age Concern in Rotherham has worked with young people as volunteers teaching older people how to use mobile phones or other technology. This has proved a great success and helped break down misconceptions between young and old. Age Concern is passionate about continuing intergenerational projects and wants to widen the involvement of all youth projects.

3. We are pleased that there will continue to be important roles for professional youth workers such as providing targeted support to young people at risk of poor outcomes, leading and managing youth facilities and services, and delivering personal and social development programmes. Local Authorities currently have a statutory duty to provide youth activities, to involve young people in decisions about provision and to publicise the offer. In Rotherham we are delivering open access services such as youth centres and clubs for sports, arts and other interests, as well as targeted services aimed at preventing disengagement from learning, involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour, unwanted teenage pregnancy, alcohol or drug misuse and obesity.

The Early Intervention teams were set up approximately 3 years ago and support the Rotherham Children and Young People's pledge which states a commitment to identifying need and supporting children, young people and families at the earliest possible stage. Teams include youth workers, youth intervention workers, Police Young People's Partnership Officers (PYPPO) Personal Advisers, substance misuse workers and young women's project workers. Strong links are in place between open access and targeted work and the model facilitates a young person's movement from one to another when needs arise or issues are worked through. A Youth Work manager in our consultation noted:

"The success of the Early Intervention teams can, in part, be ascribed to the fact that the teams are fully integrated within Universal youth work settings i.e. co-location of staff from different professional backgrounds in Youth Centres, enabling young people to have access to support and positive activities within their own communities. Additionally, team members have positive relationships with other youth professionals and agencies in the voluntary and community sector and this has been crucial in developing a seamless transition between services. These positive working relationships are contributing to a growth in a range of skills, knowledge and expertise which has become available to young people, as well as providing opportunities designed to engage them in a selection of positive, enriching and educational activities.

There is hard evidence to suggest that early intervention and prevention services are having a positive effect on the outcomes for young people. For example, the numbers of young people entering the criminal justice system has decreased by 33.9% (April 09 – March 10), thereby reducing the cost to the Police, the Courts and the Local Authority. Continued investment of staff and resources will persist in helping to reduce the need for more costly interventions, such as care proceedings, which are a huge drain on Local Authority budgets."

We believe this is an effective model for identifying and supporting young people who need targeted support particularly as we are able to work with some young people up to the age of 25. Another good practice example is Youth Start.

Youth Start is a Rotherham Youth Service Project and is part of the national network of young people's information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS). Open to all young people aged 11 to 25, Youth Start offers a universal access point to targeted and specialist services, supporting young people on a diverse range of issues that are frequently inter-related; mental and emotional health, family relationships, sex and relationships, drugs and alcohol, practical issues.

Like other YIACS, Youth Start offers a range of interventions delivered under one roof, which are;

- young person-centred,
- open to young people across a wide age range; offering a seamless service from late childhood, through adolescence and in to early adulthood,

- flexible and accessible, through self-referral and open door drop-in sessions,
- multi-disciplinary and holistic,
- free, impartial and confidential.

Through interventions including; counselling and other therapeutic support, advice, health clinics and personal support Youth Start (and other YIACS) offer a unique combination of early intervention, prevention and crisis support for young people.

The inter-relationship between young people's personal, practical, social, emotional and health problems means that interventions which improve mental health, for example, will also for many young people, lead to higher aspiration, or a reduction in their offending behaviour, or help them engage in employment or training, or improve their ability to form positive relationships with partners, or to live at home with their parents.

Youth Start's holistic approach to supporting young people aims to boost their own capacity to avoid and cope with the risks, challenges and problems they will encounter as they grow older. This develops their general well-being and their resilience to potential poor outcomes, in turn improving their quality of life and future life chances.

One of the reasons that Youth Start (and other YIACS) services are so effective is that they are shaped by young people and their needs. Young people consistently tell us how much they value and benefit from:

- Services that are specifically designed to meet their specific needs.
- Voluntary participation through self referral and open access drop in sessions.
- Responsiveness and availability, including shorter waiting lists for therapy than the statutory sector.
- Informal, non-stigmatising settings that facilitate access.
- A respect for confidentiality that is hard to provide in a statutory or mainstream setting
- Strong relationships of trust with non-judgemental staff

4. We are interested in the idea of business engagement with young people and the youth sector and this is an area we feel we can develop further. Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) together with the South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau, Rotherham Ethnic Minorities Alliance, Together for Regeneration and Rural Action South Yorkshire have launched GISMO, an online directory of voluntary, community and faith groups in Rotherham. GISMO stands for Groups Information Services Maintained Online. It is a free service. The aim is for local businesses to link with those registered and offer time (through volunteering) and/or money to organisations. VAR are also working with the Lions, Rotary and the Round Table to ensure that money can be distributed locally. On a cautionary

note some workers believe that there are massive inequalities across the country in terms of the location of major companies and businesses and some regions may be better placed than ours to attract substantial resources through this route.

5. Rotherham Youth Service has offered a progression route of Youth Work training over many years and colleagues across Rotherham working in all youth sectors have participated in this route. As community groups are being encouraged to take on provision where there have been reductions in local authority provision it is even more important that we maintain opportunities for their support and training. We want all those working with young people to have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to deliver high quality youth work. Members of the IYSS workforce development programme in Rotherham have agreed to work towards the National Youth Agency IYSS Quality Mark to ensure consistent quality standards across the borough in services to young people. Rotherham Youth Service has a reputation for delivering a quality service and was the first youth service in the country to gain and be revalidated for the National Youth Agency Quality Mark. Now over 40 organisations who work with young people will be invited to participate in the preparation for the IYSS award. We are aiming to develop protocols so that workers can work across sectors and support each other with resource issues and expertise as a matter of course.

We disagree that a centralised approach to youth workforce development is unlikely to have more than limited impact. The CWDC workforce development programme that we piloted in Rotherham has had a significant impact on partnership working meaning far greater opportunities are available for young people in Rotherham.

Skills and knowledge gaps identified within the young people's workforce currently include:

- Working with vulnerable young people 1:1
- Supervision skills
- Managing a case load
- Case notes and record keeping
- Detached Youth Work
- Group work skills
- Meeting the needs of arriving communities
- Understanding commissioning
- Young people's health and well-being issues

As we develop our Plan for Youth we intend to collate all training opportunities available to those working with young people holistically and share them across the young people's sector in Rotherham.

Only this week, as another model of good practice, 16 Apprentices from the IYSS programme and Rotherham United Football Club joined by 6 qualified staff from the voluntary and public sector are jointly undertaking Rewind training. This will equip them to work with young people in many settings working around issues including racism and extremism.

6. To conclude, a number of key points were made during our local consultation and the following points are worthy of note:

“Move away from being completely school centric!”

“Address young people’s issues and address life outside of school”

“Instead of increasing the power of schools to enforce discipline look at the causes of the behaviour”

“Resource work with young people with money from public funds. Don’t young people deserve this?”

“Ensure work is undertaken to eradicate poor transitions from children to adult services”

“Recognise the importance and necessity of outreach workers.”

“Short-termism is problematic for service development. Many issues for young people aren’t short term and it is sometimes impossible to work to prescribed timescales.”

“Involve the uniformed sector more.”

“Functioning families are essential to positive opportunities for young people; some families need support /interventions. Practice and policies should link – Corporate Parenting, Early Intervention & Prevention, Youth Work etc”

“Constructive across sector partnerships make a positive difference, they can support the “wrap around the family work” but they don’t just happen, they also need to be “serviced” to be meaningful”

“I couldn’t find any reference to Apprenticeships as a model for developing life skills for young people.”