

Choose Youth – services change

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Spending cuts to local services and government programmes are falling disproportionately hard on this country's young people. Throughout the UK youth clubs and projects, young people's volunteering schemes and a wide-range of voluntary-led youth programmes are all now at risk, as councils race to shed services in the face of colossal budget cuts. Caught in the middle are hundreds of thousands of young people.

Choose Youth, an unprecedented alliance of 30 voluntary youth sector organisations and trade unions defending the profession and its workers, has joined forces to save young people's services from government and local government cuts and to preserve the right of all 13-19 year olds, and up to 25 year olds with disabilities, to an universal, open-access youth service provision.

Together we believe that young people both deserve and need investment in their future. We believe that our youth service is too good to lose and needs investment to tackle new challenges, such as youth unemployment.

1. Benefits of youth work – Young people both deserve and need a youth service

Young people's services really do change lives. Up and down the country in youth clubs and projects, sports and volunteering programmes, music tuition, disability groups and detached youth work, the youth service is making a difference to young lives. When asked what was good about the youth service, young people have spoken out and its time their voice was heard: Here is what some of them had to say: "It keeps me off the streets and gives me a chance to talk to people my own age". "The youth club is the only activity I come to and I enjoy every session. I feel valued and respected".

"It lets us hang out with and socialise with other people we don't normally hang out with people we don't normally hang out with."

'Brilliant youth workers who listen to what you have to say without pressuring you.' Youth work works - it recognises, respects and is responsive to the needs of young people. It gives young people a voice and encourages them to think critically, be creative, develop their interests and expand their horizons. It gives them the space to have fun, socialising and meeting new friends. It is unique in that it gives young people the right to create their own youth service, around their needs. And it works

because young people choose to be involved. The work starts where young people are; on street corners, in youth clubs, wherever they feel most comfortable. It's needed now more than ever.

Choose youth says that youth work and young people's services should continue to provide a combination of universal services, such as youth centres and clubs open to all young people in the local area, and specialist projects which target particular groups of young people, usually those who are disadvantaged or socially excluded. Every young person, regardless of background, is entitled to high quality youth work, delivered by trained professionals, helping them to develop personally and socially. The aim of good youth work is to promote the social, moral, cultural, emotional and physical development of young people.

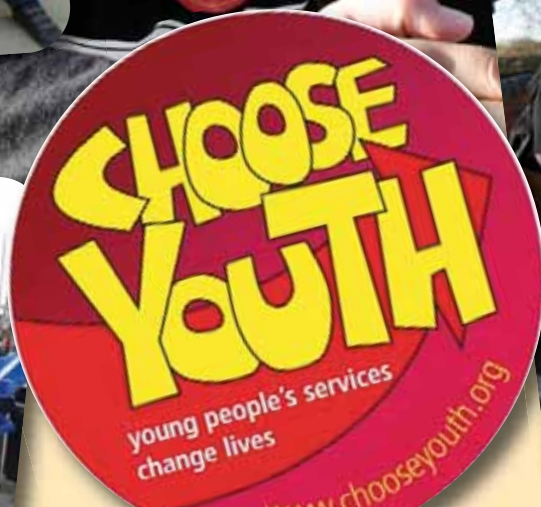
Yet government cuts are destroying the very foundations of the modern youth service; its universality.

Benefits of youth work – The cost effectiveness of young people's services

We believe that these universal services need to be protected as they play an important role in ensuring youth workers can support young people towards targeted provision. Young people who use universal youth services often face challenges in their lives and value the support and expertise of youth workers. Young people have told Choose Youth how they believe that youth services

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young people's lives



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can either prevent them from undertaking harmful behaviour or provide them with advice so they can make informed decisions about their lives.

Youth work helps young people test the boundaries between reasonable and risky behaviours.

Youth work contributes significantly to early intervention and preventative services thereby reducing the incidence of young people in need of highly targeted intensive and expensive services later on. For example, the Audit Commission report into the benefits of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour by young people estimates that a young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the age of 16. But one who is given support to stay out costs less than £50,000. Other comparative costs include:

- £1,300 per person for an electronically monitored curfew order.
- £35,000 per year to keep one young person in a young offender institution.
- £9,000 for the average resettlement package per young person after custody.

Youth work in statute

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (s6) places a statutory duty on local authorities to secure access to positive activities for young people, as well as seeking and taking account of their views.

Choose Youth will continue to ensure that local authorities fulfil their statutory duty to provide youth work in the three areas : positive activities, decision making by young people and 14-19 learning, further to section 507B Education Act 1996, while advocating for the strengthening of protection for the improvement of young people's personal and social development. Young people's services under threat - The UK's youth work infrastructure needs protecting

All over the UK community services supporting young people are in crisis amid mounting evidence that youth support is being hit by the biggest cuts to any public service. One in four of England's youth services face catastrophic cuts of between 21-30 per cent, a staggering three times

more than councils are facing generally. Many councils intend to get rid of their youth service altogether. 80 per cent of voluntary organisations providing services for young people have said targeted programmes for young people will have to be axed.

Youth service infrastructure is being pulled apart; the Youth Capital Fund has been axed, leading to the loss of much needed capital investment in buildings and infrastructure.

Young people need quality places where they can socialise with friends in safe and secure environments, where spending is determined by young people.

Skilled, knowledgeable and trusted adults, including youth workers and trained volunteers, provide the support young people need. Building strong, trusting, long lasting relationships, over a period of time, is the key to the success of youth work.

Yet local authority chiefs predict that youth service budgets will be cut by £100 million, leading to the loss of 3,000 full time youth worker jobs. 96 per cent of the 41 heads of youth services polled said that open-access youth clubs and centres will be hardest hit with such services being reduced or axed altogether.

The youth service is the 'Big Society' in action, but the government's cuts programme is starving voluntary-led youth organisations of funding as well. 70 per cent of funding for the voluntary sector, particularly for youth services comes from local authorities. According to estimates, funding cuts mean that over 400,000 young people will be denied the opportunity to volunteer. The number of workers supporting young people to volunteer will drop from 792 to 170.

At a time of escalating youth unemployment and fragile economic growth, young people are fast becoming the jilted generation. Giving young people the opportunity to volunteer and participate in services tailored to their needs teaches them important life skills that they will use throughout their lives. It brings hope, engagement, improves employability, educational prospects and

community cohesion, benefiting society as a whole.

2. Youth services – The solution – greater investment

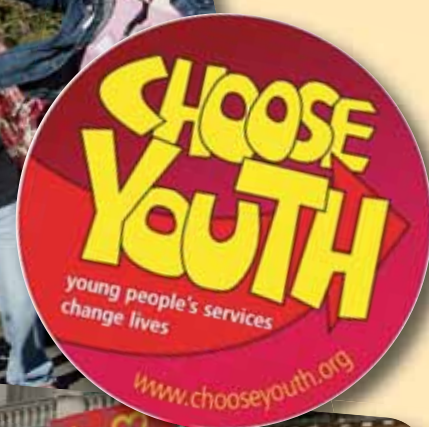
Choose Youth believes that a responsive and effective youth service needs proper investment with a dedicated, ring-fenced funding stream. A well-funded youth service promotes social inclusion, encourages partnership working, assists young people at risk, gives young people hope and is cost effective.

Choose Youth estimates that for just £350 a year per young person, all young people could take part in 'positive activities'. The current spend is £100 per head per year, yet even this paltry sum is being squeezed. Young people's services are dedicated to nurturing the talents of our young people. A professional, preventative service that supports young people on the road to success is more than paid back in the contribution they go on to make to society. For every £1 spent on the youth service £8 is generated in voluntary activity.

Youth workers are highly qualified, highly committed and are trusted by young people. Their loss will cause long term harm.

Choose Youth will campaign for greater resources to be given to young people's services and to ensure that this government and local councillors stop ripping the youth service apart. To destroy our youth service and young





people's services, whether they are youth centres, detached youth projects, youth councils, disability groups or music tuition, is to betray not just today's younger generation but our shared future.

Case studies

The X-IT Programme

Lambeth Council and its partners have been very successful in reducing youth crime rates. A major contributor to this is the X-IT programme. This is designed to help young people who are at risk of offending to move out of gangs and to engage in more positive activities. To date, 120 young people have taken part in the programme, many of whom report a rise in self-esteem and

progress to employment as a result. Some of them have gone on to train as facilitators for future programmes.

Leicestershire – Dreamers

Dreamers is a youth work project for young asylum seekers and refugees. It provides these young people with advice, guidance and a weekly programme of social and educational activities. Those who have taken part describe it as a lifeline. In the highly supportive environment created by the youth workers they have gained in confidence and self-esteem, learning a range of skills.

Dara Farrell, 17 Ashford Kent

Aspiring politician Dara comes from a single-parent family and believes he would never

have had the courage to pursue a political career without the support of youth workers. "I live on a council estate, the sort that was described by the Daily Mirror as 'social concentration camps', and just to have somewhere else to go and someone to listen to you is really important," he says.

If it wasn't for his local youth club, Dara says he could have easily fallen in with the wrong crowd, "who don't do much except hang around outside McDonald's".

He first got involved in XC youth club aged 12 because he wanted to play football. Five years on, and he is now chair of Kent's youth council as well as a member of the UK Youth Parliament.