



Practical Pointers: Youth Voice Practical Pointers leaflets aim to pass on useful information to practitioners working with young people

Young people's views about youth work and workers
By Marilyn McGowan

This research took place during a residential gathering of Youth Voice Peer Power, an empowerment project run by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence. In this project young people are asked to gather information from their peers about mental health using a range of creative techniques. The information is then disseminated to professionals with a view to informing their practice with young people.

In finding out valuable information about how to help their peers, YVPP also gives young people a voice to inform youth work practice. Many practitioners use the website to gather information to help them in their work. But what about those practitioners?

What do they do that helps young people?

Do they suffer from stress too?

Young people on the YVPP residential at Calshott, many of them now young professionals themselves share their opinions about what makes for a good service and good youth worker as well as considering issues of stress in the work.

The 4 Projects that took part

- A school in Stoke on Trent. The young people are members of a county wide co-counselling project
- A photographic project in Brighton where young people have been brought together to produce an educational photographic pack reflecting mental health issues
- Millennium Volunteers in Bournemouth. Young people have carried out two surveys. One is related to the UN report on well being of young people and the other on promoting diversity
- A peer support project in Sunderland where young people run a drop in service and sex education programme

Findings from groups

A Good Youth Project is ...

Young people and friendly staff

In order to be friendly the following skills and qualities were identified

- Communication skills
- Contribute own experiences
- Respect
- Confidence
- Self Esteem
- Good communication
- Listening Skills
- Leadership skills
- Care value base
(e.g maintain confidentiality, empower people)
- Empower people
- Smile
- Good body language
- Positive
- Get the point across
- Politeness
- Enthusiasm
- Patience
- Talking
- Adaptable to change
- Tolerance
- More like young people talking,
- Understanding
- Relevant experience
- Street wise
- Patience
- Fun loving person
- CRB check



Good activities

A wide range of activities was mentioned, including opportunities for

- Meeting new people
- Support
- Professional advice
- Changing bad thinking patterns
- Taking young people places
- Helping young people
- Give to the community
- Run groups and 1-2-1 time
- Ask young people what they want

Good atmosphere

In order to create this, the following were identified

- Good visuals
- Happy people
- To be respected, made to feel welcome
- Teamwork
- Volunteers
- Leadership
- Money

An ideal youth work project is...

- Fully government funded
- Respects local communities
- Supports people of diverse needs
- Has a wide range of young people led services
- For people aged 11-25
- Great fun

Youth workers do...

- They do projects with us...they boost self-esteem, confidence.
- They treat us as individuals and are encouraging
- They go out of their way to help with problems
- They listen, help, support
- They get us to laugh and cry, help with anger
- They help people who are in need of help
- They listen to young people

What about the youth workers? How do they think and feel?

Youth workers have big hearts

Youth workers think about...

- Helping young people
- How to get money for things young people want
- About how young people look, feel and whether they need time
- How to balance needs of group and individuals

Youth workers should be...

- Positive, think like young people, not bossy, like a friend, open minded, have knowledge of young people
- Generous, funny, understanding, full of praise and helpful
- They think the young people do what they would like to do

***Youth workers think the young people are
BRILLIANT!***

Youth workers feel...

Nervous

Interested in young people

Excited

Look forward to working with young people

Kind, caring,

Stressed, upset yet loving

Angry at bad situations for young people

Happy, relaxed, chilled out, laid back.

Funny, humorous, have a laugh/sense of humour,

Are real, honest

Stress in Youth Workers

"Youth workers do not bring their problems to work."

"Youth workers are paid £34-36 k per annum and in addition receive benefits like free tea and coffee, and going on residential...don't they?"

In discussion about stress in youth workers, many said youth workers did not get stressed or if they did they didn't notice. However, when quizzed further on this, young people said they were able to tell when something was wrong and they used the word 'intuitive' to describe their ability to pick up on workers problems. Also, when workers were stressed they often responded with a stressed reaction themselves. They were also shocked to learn that salaries for face to face youth work was considerably less than they had thought.

When asked about support, they mentioned the following as places youth workers could seek support:

- Family and friends
- Counselling
- Leave problems at home –don't talk about personal problems but ok to get time out
- Action gets reaction
- Support each other
- More than 1 youth worker working together but should be equality in their working
- Young people..."we could help but not sure how" Should adults open up to young people? Personal issues should be shared but not the full details
- The employing organisation's mentor or counsellor

What do the youth workers think?

Two young people facilitated this discussion group with four adult youth workers

Features of a good youth organisation...

- Looks deeper... has hope
- Adaptable
- Flexible
- Focus based on times
- Positivity
- Understands the harder young people are...the more knocks they've had
 - Relates to people...communication skills, more on young people's level,
- Structure
- Well organised
- Premises
- Qualified staff-training, including part time staff
- New way of communication-internet, email, help sites, anonymous, technical problems

What are the stresses facing youth workers?

- Lack of funding - jobs not safe; funding is so short term, you don't get time to develop the work properly and to prove it works

- Constantly having to be innovative
- Responding to fashionable funding stream
- Maintaining boundaries-switching off letting go
- Going the extra mile for young people in particular need
- Your work colleagues
- Overwork
- Paperwork and emphasis on recorded outcomes but no extra time to do it
- Lots of young people in distress at the same time
- Paperwork and cynicism
- Funding-evidence-records
- Self doubt-where to draw the line –emotional detachment
- Always new ideas ...but if it's good and worked, why can't it continue?
- Using young people in funding bids and vice versa...goes against the grain and what you think is right
- Getting involved-to what extent?

What Support is useful?

- Peer Support
- Non managerial supervision
- Good management/co-ordinators
- Regular meetings
- Working with colleagues in related fields-new perspectives
- Breaks and holidays, non contact time
- Reflective practice

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