

Enabling Great Youth Work to Happen

Our strategy for youth work in every place and space

2024-2029



About us

We know that youth work changes lives

As the national body for youth work in England, the National Youth Agency exists to champion the value of youth work for young people, for local communities and for society. We work in partnership and believe in collaborative leadership, listening to youth workers and the youth work sector so that we can understand their needs and respond to the challenges they face. We are ambitious for youth work and for young people and integrate youth voice and influence across our work.

We work to grow youth work provision in ways that keep it effective, relevant, safe and engaging to help millions of young people take steps to reach their potential and thrive. We do this by providing standards, frameworks and resources, as well as professional development, and peer learning opportunities to build the skills and capacity of the workforce. We also provide a range of expertise and tailored support for those commissioning and delivering youth work to help them provide a high-quality offer which embeds best practice. We also work to grow the evidence base through new research and data, raising awareness of the value of youth work alongside allied professionals in all places and spaces, as well as advocate for increased investment.

NYA is a registered charity and relies on the support of a range of funders to support our work.

Why youth work?

Youth work is an educational process which takes place in a range of contexts and settings to support a young person's personal, social and educational development. It is focused on improving wellbeing, not just through the consideration of an individual's physical, mental, or emotional health, but also the surrounding contextual influences that affect a young person's ability to achieve their goals.

Youth workers build voluntary trusted relationships with young people, providing a safe space and fun and engaging activities to nurture young people's skills and interests. Through youth work, young people develop their voice, influence and place in society while building a set of practical or technical skills and competencies, to realise their full potential.

“I'm probably the happiest I've been for ages, and I can feel like myself again. Being myself is a main priority and doing youth work and things that make me happy – it's made me come really far.”

From lost soul to aspiring youth worker
Lacie's Story¹

¹ www.nya.org.uk/inspiring-stories/

Why youth work matters

Over the past five years, the country has undergone significant changes, and at the heart of our promising collective future, lies the ambitions, skills, and positivity of young people.

Young lives are increasingly complex, as they transition from child to adulthood in a society shaped by rapid technological advancements, social change, climate change and unprecedented global challenges. The digital era has transformed communication, education, and employment, presenting boundless possibilities, yet also giving rise to concerns about screen time, online safety, and digital wellbeing. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the significance of resilience, adaptability, and mental health support for young people.

Young people have never needed the support of skilled youth workers more, as they navigate a world of opportunities and unique challenges. Yet against this backdrop, youth organisations and local authorities have fought to keep delivering great youth work amidst a £1 billion real terms cut in spending by local authorities on youth services since 2010. The National Youth Agency is working tirelessly with partners to tackle funding challenges, to address employment, recruitment and retention crises for youth workers and to promote the value of youth work across all sectors.

We are ambitious for youth work and for young people and are determined that all young people should have the opportunity to benefit from the life-changing impact of extraordinary youth workers and trained volunteers. Those able to continue delivering youth work, albeit on limited budgets, have provided invaluable support to young people who face challenges and barriers that might otherwise derail their lives. Despite this we know that many young people are still unable to access the dedicated support that a youth worker can provide.

The challenges faced by disadvantaged young people, including those with additional needs, from marginalised backgrounds, minority communities, and those experiencing challenges such as exploitation, poverty, unemployment and homelessness, remain pressing concerns. Without adequate support and opportunities, these young people may find themselves trapped in a cycle of lifelong hardship.





Adolescence is a time of discovery and growth when young people benefit from and value access to opportunities, relationships and support that can help them when and where it is needed. Great youth work offers exactly that; creating spaces where every young person can feel safe, thrive and have their voices heard. They can start to realise their potential and see their role and value in their communities and beyond.

In these ever-changing times, we remain adaptable, innovative, and responsive to the evolving needs of our young people and the extraordinary youth workers who support them.

“

There are communal areas for chatting, but also private spaces if you need a chat with a youth worker. One thing I’m so grateful for, is being able to have somebody unbiased who can listen to my problems.”

From poor mental health to being able to better manage his condition and making new friends – Dennis’s story²

We continue to support and grow a youth sector that bridges gaps, inspires hope, and fosters a sense of belonging.

The transformative impact of youth work deserves to be recognised. As guardians of youth work in England, we will continue to advocate for youth work recognition and investment to build and support a talented and committed workforce to foster the very best practice and empower young people to be the architects of their own positive futures.

² www.nya.org.uk/inspiring-stories/

What we are here to do



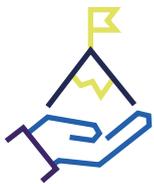
OUR VISION

A world where every young person can access youth work



OUR MISSION

Enable more people to deliver great youth work



OUR PURPOSE

Enable great youth work to happen by setting the standards, growing the capacity and building the case to improve the quality and quantity of youth work in England

These are our constants, our unwavering anchors that focus us on our collective impact.

Our strategy takes these constants and sharpens our focus on the current contexts, identifying the priorities of need to keep our impact high. It sets out how we will work together with funders, partners, young people and wider stakeholders to build upon our past successes, forge new partnerships, and explore innovative avenues to enable greater impact on youth work and young lives.

At the centre of our work is the commitment to being youth informed at every step – from understanding young peoples' lived experiences; building their voice and influence in our work and the wider youth sector; and providing paid opportunities that give young people equity in our team, as part of our mission to grow more and better youth work for young people.



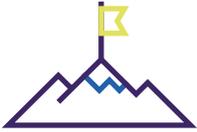
Our values

Our values underpin what we do and how we do it. We are committed to being the very best we can be and our values define us.



COLLABORATIVE

We connect to share, learn and grow. We know that together we are greater than the sum of our parts.



DETERMINED

We are ambitious for youth work and for young people and push ourselves to overcome barriers and open up new opportunities.



INCLUSIVE

We embrace, respect and value diversity in all its forms and act in a way that demonstrates this in all we do.



AUTHENTIC

We say what we believe and follow it up with action.



BOLD

We are evidence-informed and innovate to push boundaries.



Our achievements

Upskilling and growing the workforce

Since 2021 we have supported nearly

1,000

people to gain youth work qualifications through around **£2 million** worth of bursaries



In 2023 we helped about

200

learners gain youth work qualifications via the NYA Academy – our online learning platform



Since 2019 we have offered **33** different youth work training programmes on behalf of **16 organisations**

such as the Premier League Charitable Fund and the Boathouse in Blackpool



Bringing together practitioners to promote best practice



In **2023** we consulted

with some **700**

delegates from the youth sector through nine regional events, which helped inform our Joining the Dots report and inform our new strategic priorities



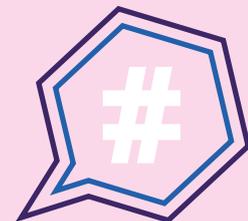
We created opportunities for **1550** participants from the youth sector to deepen their knowledge through a programme of online practice-led sessions and expert panel discussions

Our annual Youth Work Week campaign has directly reached nearly **625,000** people since 2020 and the #YWW23 hashtag appeared in the feeds of **6 million** people

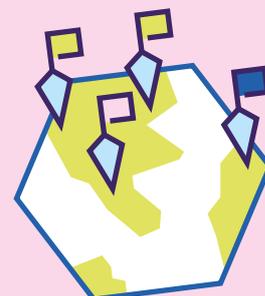
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We brought together over **1,000** youth workers from **48** countries over three days for the **4th Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work** in June 2023



Providing guidance and resources to enable high quality delivery

The NYA website has received over **780,000** views since 2020



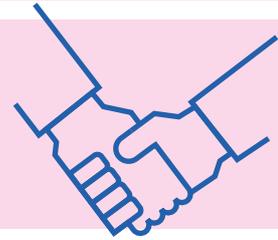
During the **Covid-19** pandemic guidance materials were downloaded **89,000** times



The Safeguarding Hub was accessed **8,196** times during 2023 and **18,783** since 2020



As a key partner in the **£300m** Youth Investment Fund we have provided support to **135** grantees comprising training and practical feedback on their youth work offer



Collating evidence and insights to inform policy

Since the Census was launched in 2021, over **3000** responses (over 28,000 organisations or sub-units) have completed returns helping to build a picture of the youth sector in England



We have also consulted with over **200** organisations to collate evidence of where youth work is taking place with and in schools and alternative provision



We consulted with over **1000** youth work practitioners, organisations and young people during 2023 to develop guidance on delivering youth work in private dwellings

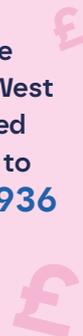


Providing opportunities to build the skills and aspirations of young people

The amplifi website, which provided creative skills development opportunities for young people, was viewed almost **700,000** times since 2020



Through our corporate partnership with NatWest bank, we have delivered NatWest Thrive (face to face) to more than **1,936** young people across **32** clubs since 2022



We have provided opportunities for **46** young people to give critical feedback and build their communication and leadership skills via the NatWest Thrive Youth Participation Group



In 2022-23 we recruited and trained **17** Young Assessors to help narrow down applications to the Youth Investment Fund programme and decide where funds should be allocated.



Our strategic priorities for 2024-2029:

Youth work in all places and spaces

Over the next five years, our strategic priorities will focus on growing the footprint of youth work, opening up more opportunities for youth work and youth workers to meet young people in the places and spaces where they are. We will also be creating innovative routes into, and pathways through, the youth work profession to attract 10,000 qualified, full-time youth workers into the workforce by 2030.

This activity will build on our efforts, over the past five years, to help rebuild the youth work sector, reaffirming its essential role as a vital service for young people. The Covid-19 pandemic shone a light on the unique role of youth workers across the country in supporting some of our most vulnerable young people, with youth workers given 'key worker' status.

We have also been reimagining the reach of youth work to meet young people in the places and spaces where they are, providing the support of a trusted adult, access to enrichment activities and the opportunity to form new friendships. Youth work principles, ethos and methodology, underpinned by the National Youth Work Curriculum, are proven to change the trajectory of young people's lives in remarkable ways.

Our new strategy builds on the findings and recommendations of our Joining the Dots3 consultation designed to better understand the needs of grassroots youth organisations and how the NYA, along with sector partners, can support frontline youth workers to make great youth work happen.



³ NYA (2023), *Joining the dots: Supporting grassroots youth organisations to make great youth work happen*.

⁴ NYA (2023), *Better Together: Youth Work with schools report*. Available at: *Better Together: Youth Work with Schools report – NYA*

Youth work's influence extends far beyond conventional boundaries, permeating allied sectors with its transformative impact. Our *Better together: Youth work with schools report*⁴ demonstrated the potential of increased understanding and partnership-working between schools and the youth sector to support young people. In healthcare, youth workers engage in vital initiatives addressing mental health, substance abuse prevention and sexual health education.

Collaborating with healthcare professionals, youth workers provide safe spaces for open dialogue, offering essential support for navigating the complexities of growing up whilst also supporting the transition for paediatric to adult services. In youth justice settings, youth workers play a pivotal role in providing tailored support and guidance, through a deep understanding of all the contextual factors around them to empower young people towards positive life outcomes. Sports settings provide positive activities for young people, integrating youth work methodology to enrich the relational practice and personal learning opportunity. In the arts and culture sector, youth work encourages young people to explore their talents, celebrate their own cultural heritage and contribute to a rich tapestry of artistic endeavours.

“

Once you've got the trusted relationship with a young person, everything else can happen. The ability for someone to link into the community from the school needs to be embedded in the school approach. A youth worker within the school is able to think about what sits around the school and the opportunities that they can take up.”

London Violence Reduction Unit, oral evidence to the *Youth work with schools review*

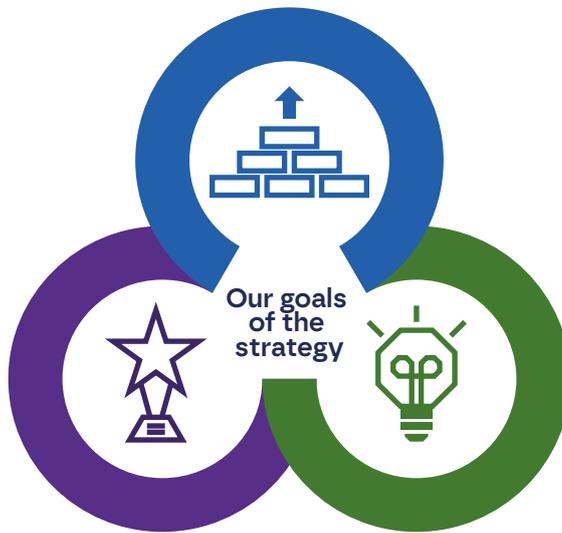
In these allied sector environments, youth work serves as a vital force for personal growth, skill acquisition, and community engagement, fostering a generation that is informed, empowered, and prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow.



Our goals and how will we achieve them

We will shape activities each year as part of our annual business planning process. This will involve reflecting on progress and learning and analysis of the external landscape and sector needs.

We will build the case and profile for youth work across England



We will drive excellence in practice to reflect the youth work needs of today and tomorrow

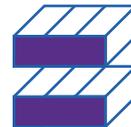
We will future-proof the youth work profession through widening opportunities for youth workers

We have provided an overview of our business plan for 2023 -2024 on pages 12 -14. We will be measuring and reporting on the progress towards our strategic goals using an impact measurement framework. This will enable us to understand what is working and where we need to revise or develop our activities in future annual plans in order to achieve our targets. To find out more about what we do, please visit www.nya.org.uk

Skilled youth workers



High quality youth work



Impactful outcomes



We will build the profile and case for youth work across England

Targets

We will build a body of evidence that demonstrates the need for, and impact of youth work across our communities.

We will grow investment in the youth work sector infrastructure.

We will rally the voices of national, regional and grass roots youth work to celebrate and ask for more and better youth work.

What does that look like?

We will focus on data and research from across England that collectively build the most comprehensive view of youth work, youth workers and young lives.

We will secure support from existing and new funders to enable infrastructure, support and delivery of youth work nationally, regionally and locally.

Through innovative campaigns and collaborative activity, we will shine a light on the value and impact of great youth work to make a compelling case to key decision-makers.

Our work in 24/25

- Delivery and analysis of the National Youth Work Census
- Evolve a Data Warehouse to grow our collective knowledge and insights, facilitating sharing and learning across the sector
- Prioritise research themes that inform youth work practice in line with the changing needs of young people and the world around them
- Regular publication of impact/state of the sector reports

- Engage government departments in the case for youth work, connecting with allied sectors across health, schools, justice and sport
- Grow our innovative programme activity with corporate funders to flow more opportunities and investment direct to community organisations and young people
- Monitor the investment in youth work through Government Grant Making Trusts, and other funding sources

- Deliver Youth Work Week annually, themed to reflect the priority drivers of the time, growing engagement year on year across the UK and Commonwealth
- Facilitate the work of the National Youth Sector Advisory Board as a collective policy and action vehicle for sustainable change
- Lead policy activity to capture and promote the needs of youth workers, youth work and young people to influencers, policy makers and funders across England

We will future-proof the youth work profession through widening opportunities for youth workers

Targets

We will open up apprenticeship learning pathways and funding as an accessible route to youth work qualifications to bring new workers to youth work.

We will support the diversification of the workforce and its leadership to reflect the communities in which young people live.

We will evolve the national infrastructure that protects and grows the frameworks for youth work qualifications and professional growth.

What does that look like?

We will expand apprenticeship learning at Level 6 and Level 3 through increased awareness and access to the apprenticeship levy to support learning costs for youth work qualifications.

Through partnership working we will undertake activity to map, plan and grow diversity and inclusion across the youth work sector and across allied sectors.

Our Education and Training Standards Committee will evolve the frameworks for qualifications to support diversity and inclusion to power a new generation of qualified youth workers.

Our work in 24/25

- Support Level 6 apprentices through our funded programmes.
- Support providers to set up and offer programmes of learning.
- Secure an additional £1 million p/a in levy transfers from employers and/or corporate to grow apprenticeships and training opportunities
- Share reports on the number of newly qualified youth workers, through NYA and other programmes.

- Secure investment to advance representation and support for diversity and inclusion within the youth work sector; young people, youth workers and leaders
- Facilitate a national conversation on diversity in the workforce and create an aligned strategy to focus our work
- Showcase the routes into youth work and the career paths available through inspiring communications
- Produce a regular, annual monitoring report on the state of the youth sector

- Delivery and analysis of a National Youth Worker Register to provide recognition and status to youth workers and build the picture of the places, spaces and contexts that they are applying their practice
- Secure investment and build learning resources to offer relevant, engaging and impactful development
- Share data around level of investment secured through government, grant making trusts and other sources

We will drive excellence in practice to reflect the youth work needs of today and tomorrow

Targets

We will grow opportunities for innovation in youth work practice, testing and learning to evolve practice.

We will increase the accessibility and application of NYA standards and frameworks as enablers for reflective, developmental practice.

We will use our data and research alongside our horizon scanning to respond to new areas for practice evolution and support.

What does that look like?

Working in partnership across England with young people and stakeholders, we will flow investment to support local delivery and together gather insights on new approaches to keep youth work responsive and impactful to changing needs.

We will work with partners to explore where and how our standards and frameworks can best support high quality youth work.

We will respond to emerging themes and work with our partners to devise new frameworks that build awareness, skills and competence in youth work delivery.

Our work in 24/25

- Deliver our Thrive community Programme
- Develop a digital strategy for youth work to highlight the technologies and opportunities for youth work delivery
- Work with local partners to develop strategies to increase the quality and quantity of youth work

- Make NYA and wider sector resources freely available on Youth Work One, the sector owned digital platform
- Deliver our Routes to Community Success Programme
- Deliver our organisational development work as part of the Youth Investment Fund to drive quality practice
- Share progress on how our work is making a difference to the youth sector and young people's lives

- Continue to add new resources to the NYA Safeguarding Hub and the National Youth Work Curriculum
- Create new Digital Youth Work Standards to support safe and effective online practice
- Grow engagement and participation of individuals and organisations in Youth Work One as a shared community for youth work across England