



## Economic Impact of Coronavirus Response to the Treasury Select Committee

### 1. About NYA

The National Youth Agency (NYA) is the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) for youth work in England; we act as the national body for advice and guidance to Government and Local Government Association. We represent the youth sector at all levels and across our networks from professional youth workers and skilled volunteers, open-access and specialist youth and community work, national quality standards and support for youth organisations. NYA runs the National Youth Advisory Board for policy with government, the national Education and Training Standards Committee for quality practice, and the NYA Academy for training and networks. We have convened also a National Youth Work Experts Group to oversee the Coronavirus pandemic and emergency measures, leading on contextualised advice and guidance for youth workers, employers and funders, and in collaboration with youth sector organisations.

Youth work is going to be a key element of the national response to tackle Covid-19, supporting especially the most vulnerable and, without schools or youth centres open, the most isolated young people. Many of those young people in turn provide community support through peer groups and social action. The need for this work to ramp up in both pace and scale is vital to ensure that no time is lost as we all continue to do 'whatever it takes' to tackle the Covid-19 crisis and to help service transition from face-to-face delivery to online or detached delivery of support for young people. Our focus is on:

- Providing support, resources and training for the sector to re-organise and consolidate whilst the crisis unfolds;
- Working with funders and partners to put in place digital support for youth work and digital resources for young people, and further the deployment of detached (street-based) youth work;
- Securing the foundations for youth organisations and youth workers to sustain and develop services and support for young people as we emerge from and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

### 2. Risks for young people

The economic impact of the pandemic is immediate in funding short-fall for youth organisations many of which are smaller charities and community groups, and services funded or delivered by over-stretched local authorities with competing demands on their resources at this time of crisis.

The current youth workforce is 25:75 professional youth workers and adult volunteers. There is a need to urgently work with employers and funders to secure income for youth workers as a vital part of civil society as part of any financial package to charities and in support of local government services, and as essential key workers.

Hundreds of thousands of young people are supported each week by youth workers and volunteers. With the closure of schools and social distancing, youth work in community settings and online is an essential service for many. The closure of youth projects, drop-in sessions and access to 1-2-1 or group work support is having a devastating and profound impact on many young people. This is compounded by the anxiety that COVID-19 brings everyone.

There has been a positive response to the Secretary of State's announcement to mobilise young people, seeing them as an integral part of civil society and social action resource. It is essential that safeguarding

practice and support from trained youth work/professionals is in place and resourced. We need to consider too how the youth workforce can be safely mobilised and best deployed at a time of social isolation including increased use of detached, street-based youth work.

Within this approach there needs to be a greater focus on and investment in support of the most vulnerable groups of young people, from the mass closure of many of the services young people rely on. The youth suicide rate is already high and the number of young people at risk of being exploited, threatened and abused will increase. Young people who attend specialist LGBT+ groups, young carers, mental health youth work support, violent crime reduction activity and many more are now at significant enhanced risk, needing the support of their skilled and qualified youth worker.

### **3. Essential youth services**

The financial package and emergency measures announced by Government need to go further in recognition of the essential service that youth work provides, to be sustained as a response to the pandemic and to secure youth and community provision in its aftermath.

There are areas of additional support to secure cross-government resources; in particular,

- **DfE:** recognition of youth work and collaboration with schools, where youth work workers can support provision which will continue in schools (vulnerable children and families of health workers, etc, and as a community hub for detached youth work activities (when youth centres are closed));
- **Home Office:** how vital specialist and detached youth work can be sustained, where the Violence Reduction Units are reporting concerns relating to the reduced flow of drugs into the UK resulting in increased gang activity, leading to an increase in county lines and exploitation;
- **Health:** contextualised support and guidance youth workers with peer-led online resources to up-skill other professionals and trusted adults working in related areas with vulnerable young people in particular, to further reduce the pressure on the NHS services;
- **DCMS/Civil Society:** the development of online resources and 'indoor activities' supported by government agencies (arts, culture, film, sports) for coherence and consistency of quality provision, avoiding duplication of resources and ensuring safeguarding; including work with and support from the BBC in that regard.

**This requires further action from Government for:**

- a) Emergency funding:** to ensure survival of youth organisations – large and small – within any emergency provision from the Government for the charity-sector as a whole; and to recognise where there are significant pressures on local authority services that are not statutory but vital in support of youth work. There is urgent consideration of funding for youth sector organisations to meet immediate needs through cancellation of activities and loss of income, yet increased demands in support of young people.
- b) Key worker status:** to recognise youth work – and specific cohorts of youth workers – as key workers where services are maintained in person throughout the period of social isolation; in particular for detached youth work that is street-based or working from schools as community hubs (while youth centres are closed), and professional youth workers in health and prevention teams working with vulnerable young people.

#### **4. Cross-sector support for young people**

Emergency funding will help secure current work carried out with young people, to innovate and develop digital youth work and to increase detached, community-based youth work. Youth workers are already hugely flexible, adaptable and resilient. However, there is still a great need to support them to direct a financial package and resources to sustain and develop youth work provision as we emerge from and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

As the crisis evolves the needs of young people will change. The impact of school closures, social isolation and anxieties felt by young people comes at a critical time of their lives for life-choices, risky behaviours and their personal and social development through adolescence. This will have a significant long term impact beyond the immediate public health crisis.

**It is the right time to plan and prepare now to meet those needs through recognition of and investment in quality youth services:**

- a) Where greater use of youth work as a form of education** outside of school-settings provides practical, technical and life-skills (including character and resilience) that are well-regarded by employers; with the adaptation and application of the youth work curriculum, complementary to schools-provision in particular for and after a prolonged period of school and college closures.
- b) With recognition of youth work to reduce the pressure on other statutory services**, for greater preventative measures rather than supporting young people solely at the point of crisis; and where other professional groups can be up-skilled in youth work alongside qualified youth workers for sustained support over time, in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis.
- c) To deliver a positive agenda with young people**, in a renewal of democratic and civic engagement invested in civil society and to meet the needs of future-employment; while the immediate needs are to support the most vulnerable and preventative measures over the longer term, it is crucial young people's voice, lived-experience and enterprise is harnessed to the full as we shape society going forward.

#### **5. Youth work: case studies**

Youth and community work is undertaken not only as stand-alone service, but also a key part of other services. Its effect and impact is therefore essential as part of the national response to the pandemic, supporting young people but also freeing up other services which are on the 'front line' of this crisis – especially for those children, young people, and families who now cannot access other services.

##### **a) Youth work as a family support service - The Epiphany People**

Our organisations support families impacted with child criminal exploitation. We typically deliver parenting programmes, support groups and one to ones with families at heart. We know the real impact and struggles that families go through.

The bulk of our work is face to face service. However, we have been supporting families over the phone for some time now and we will adapt other technologies. Our workers as qualified family support workers and are knowledgeable in the risks impact of criminal exploitation and county lines.

We recognise that at a time of self-isolation and school closures that this will prove to be very challenging to families; relationships, finances and overall wellbeing. Young people may take on some of these pressures and may seek illegal means to earn money or provide. Our profession fear that this risk-taking behaviour, combined with the shortages in drug supply and the use of children seem as 'immune' to Covid-19, will lead to fatalities and family disruption.

**b) Youth work as an alternative to statutory service: ACT CiC**

ACT are currently working hard with the young people to find new sources of entertainment.

More generally, over the last 4 years ACT have been providing Detached Youth Intervention Services across Walsall and Birmingham engaging with groups of young people on the streets, in order to share information, discuss concerns, options, advocate on young people's behalf and support young people to make better decisions. We have often operated in response to anti-social behaviour where police intervention has proved to be ineffective.

Having worked with many young people and their families through schools and other projects, we have built many positive relationships with young people in many of the key areas across the West Midlands. This enables us to gain quick access to young people, build trusted relationships and support young people within their chosen spaces.

**c) Dedicated online youth service: The Mix**

The Mix is the only dedicated and specific online youth work provider:

<https://www.themix.org.uk/> . This service offers youth worker moderated group and 1-2-1 virtual chat spaces alongside a wealth of online information and content for young people.

During COVID-19 The Mix is offering free digital training to all youth workers who need it, supported by NYA's team to provide additional professional moderation capacity.

**6. Concluding remarks**

- a) NYA is calling for professional youth workers and cohorts of skilled volunteers to be recognised as an essential service. Qualified youth workers can be deployed to maintain services online and for increased detached youth work, and help secure safeguarding measures alongside other professions up-skilled in youth work (teachers, police officers, etc).
- b) Sustaining statutory and voluntary youth services will be vital in the mobilisation of adult volunteers to support young people, and the facilitation of young people as volunteers too in response to the crisis.
- c) Emergency funding is required now to secure youth services and youth work provision in the face of the challenges from the pandemic and to meet the immediate needs of young people in particular vulnerable groups. Planning and preparation is required now to shape and invest in youth work as we emerge from and in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- d) The failure to invest in our young people will have a lasting economic impact as a negative outcome from the pandemic and is a missed opportunity to frame a positive agenda that will engage young people as a vital part of civil society and democracy.

National, regional and local youth services cannot be de-prioritised at this time, they are an essential part of the solution in support of and working with young people.

23rd March 2020

**Leigh Middleton**  
**Chief Executive**

