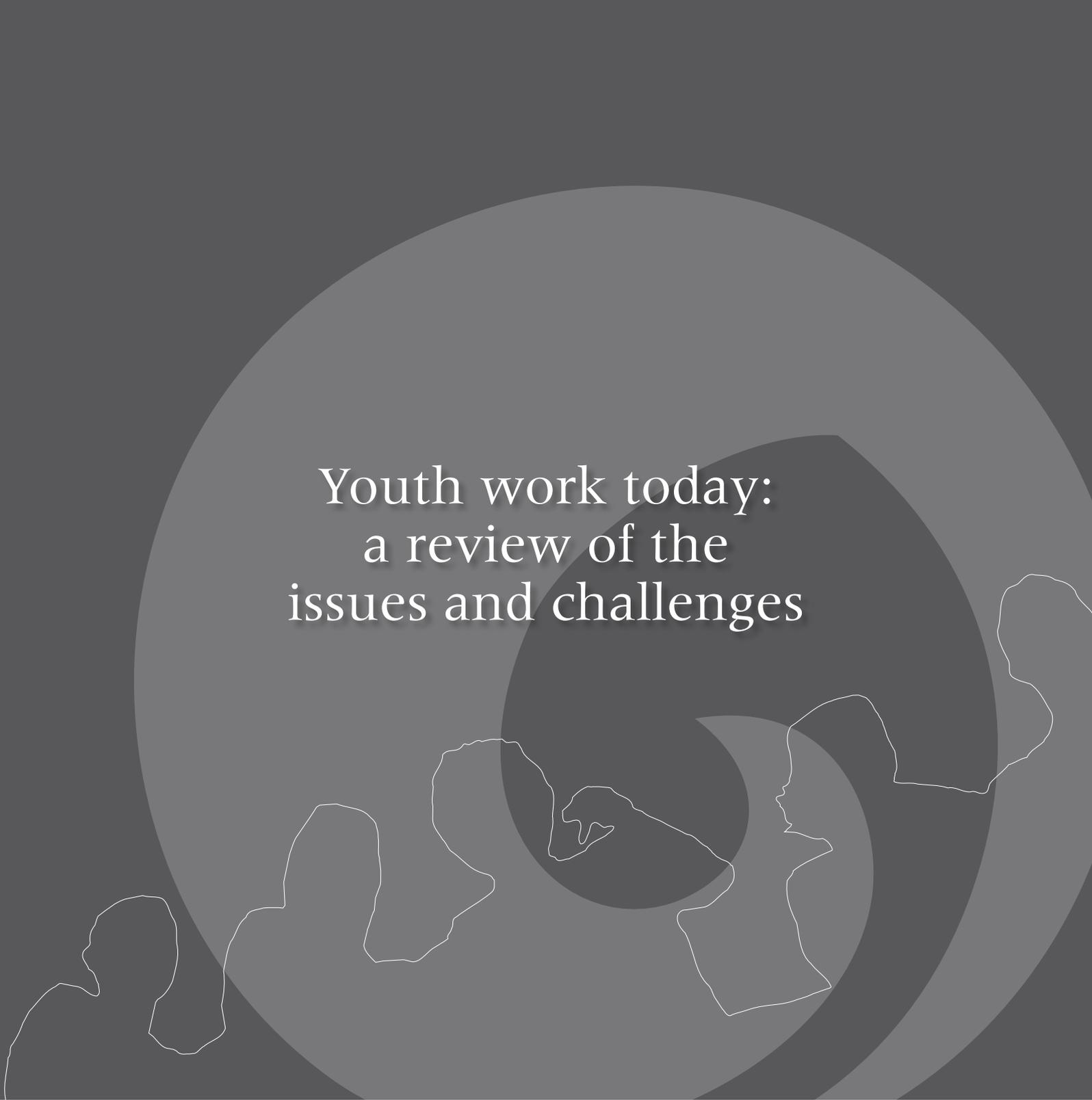


Youth work today:  
a review of the  
issues and challenges

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF YOUTH WORK IN NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM





# Youth work today: a review of the issues and challenges

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF YOUTH WORK IN NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY HELENA BARWICK

APRIL 2006



**MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI

*Administered by the Ministry of Social Development*

## **Disclaimer**

This literature review and analysis was produced by Helena Barwick for the Ministry of Youth Development. Its purpose is to inform discussion on the youth work profession and help shape strategies to strengthen the youth work workforce. The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Ministry of Youth Development.

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## **Published by:**

Ministry of Youth Development

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Wellington

New Zealand

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**[www.myd.govt.nz](http://www.myd.govt.nz)**

ISBN 0-478-25025-8

Copies are available from the Ministry of Youth Development and on its website: **[www.myd.govt.nz](http://www.myd.govt.nz)**

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Across the world, so it seems, youth work practice is in a similar position, groping towards professionalism from different directions.

In some countries the process is beginning by constituting professional associations. In others it is being driven by minimum mandatory standards of training. In others still, government regulation by law provides the incentive, or concern with ethics or the drafting of a code of ethics may be the issue (Sercombe, 2004).

## summary

The Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) commissioned this literature review to help shape strategies designed to strengthen the youth work workforce. It examines key issues facing the youth work sector in New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom, and touches briefly on youth work in the United States.

The review attempts to assess the relevance of these countries' strategies to strengthen their youth work sectors to the work that is being undertaken in New Zealand.

### **Youth work in New Zealand**

While New Zealand has had a defined youth work sector for more than 30 years, for much of that time it has lacked a distinct and cohesive identity.

A review of the history of youth work in New Zealand shows that government has repeatedly funded schemes to support youth workers, and has long recognised the need for youth worker training.

A national research project involving New Zealand youth workers in 2005 shows that the youth work sector involves large numbers of volunteers and part-time workers, many of whom have just a few years experience. Many enter youth work with no qualifications, and only about one in 12 has a youth work qualification.

While there is good evidence of strong commitment and sound practice among youth workers, the youth work sector in New Zealand has struggled through lack of:

- a national policy framework to guide the direction of youth work and the development of the workforce

- a united voice through a national association or professional body
- a strong trade union able to advocate for better pay and employment conditions
- a widely accepted code of ethics to guide practice
- high quality, accessible training to strengthen the quality of practice and the status of youth work.

### **Youth work in Australia**

Australian youth work academics are leading the debate about the need for youth work in Australia to become more professional. Without a professional status, youth workers are often marginalised, or questionable practice passes in the name of youth work. Youth work agencies can also be overlooked by funders, or have expectations imposed on them that are incompatible with principled youth work practice.

However, some youth workers are concerned that a more professionalised practice will leave no place for effective but unconventional methods of working with young people. They also fear it may mean they will no longer be free to challenge institutions of power if they disadvantage young people.

Professionalisation comes in a number of forms, such as professional associations, codes of ethics, accreditation of training institutions and licensing and regulation of practice. Much of the professionalisation debate in Australian states has focused around the adoption of a code of ethics.

The arguments for and against professionalising youth work lead quickly to the call for youth work to better articulate what it is and what it does. There is a sense that youth workers need to bring more rigour and theoretical underpinning to analysis of their work.

The tensions within youth work practice include working out who youth workers are working for, finding a balance between meaningful processes and outcomes, and between being responsive to needs and sometimes challenging them.

### **Youth work in the United Kingdom**

The introduction of the government's Connexions strategy in 2001 was a catalyst for strong debate about the nature of youth work, and the merits of having the role of youth workers determined by government policy. One commentator observed at the time that youth work suddenly, and rather uncomfortably, found itself at the heart of government policy rather than being ignored on the fringes.

The aim of the Connexions strategy is to link young people into education and equip them to fit into existing social structures and expectation. But there is concern from the youth work sector that the policy is too narrowly focused, and that it offers little to marginalised young people, who may have their access to services further reduced.

Connexions has provoked some strong criticism, as well as prompting calls for youth workers and not the government to define what they do. The sector is also being challenged to reaffirm its commitment to working creatively with young people whose links with society are weak.

Youth work in the United Kingdom (UK) is supported by a strong and active trade union, which negotiates pay and employment conditions for members. It also plays a key role in accrediting youth worker training courses, and has established links between graduation from accredited courses and pay and conditions.

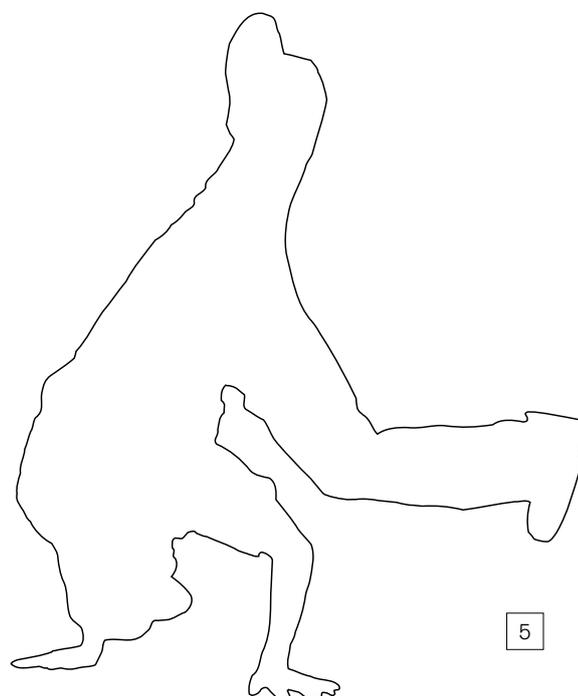
Scotland is currently consulting on the structure and content of a National Youth Work Strategy to ensure the delivery of quality youth work at a national and local level.

### **Conclusion**

The challenge for New Zealand is to strengthen the youth worker workforce in ways that support rather than restrict its diversity. The youth work sector needs to be able to speak with a clear and united voice if it is to be accorded the status of a professional group, yet that voice needs to also reflect the diversity within the sector.

Given that the youth work sector in New Zealand includes many part-time workers, a significant volunteer workforce, and many people without qualifications, there is a danger that national strategies, professional associations, stronger trade unions and training courses will not engage or support much of the workforce.

It may be wise for the next steps towards strengthening the sector to focus on the promotion and discussion of a code of ethics, and the provision of a range of high quality, accessible, and specialised youth work training.



# 1.0 introduction

In July 2005, MYD initiated the Youth Workers' Workforce Development Project to identify practical ways to support and strengthen the youth work sector.

As part of this project, it commissioned this literature review to better understand issues affecting the sector, and answer the following questions.

- What are the key characteristics of the youth work workforce in New Zealand?
- What issues are faced by youth workers?
- How do the issues faced by the youth work sector in New Zealand compare with issues identified in Australia and the UK?
- What efforts have been made to strengthen the youth work sector in Australia, the UK and other countries?
- How transferable to New Zealand are strategies and initiatives that have been applied to strengthen youth work in other countries?

## 1.1 Sources of material

As with all literature reviews, the degree to which the review can fulfil its aims depends upon the extent and quality of the material identified and retrieved. The Ministry of Social Development Information Centre searched for potentially relevant information from the following sources:

- The Information Centre database
- Austrom, Social Sciences Index
- Social Work Abstracts
- Sociological Abstracts
- PsychINFO
- CareData
- ChildData
- Index New Zealand
- New Zealand National Bibliography
- Social Services Abstracts
- The International Bibliography of the Social Sciences.

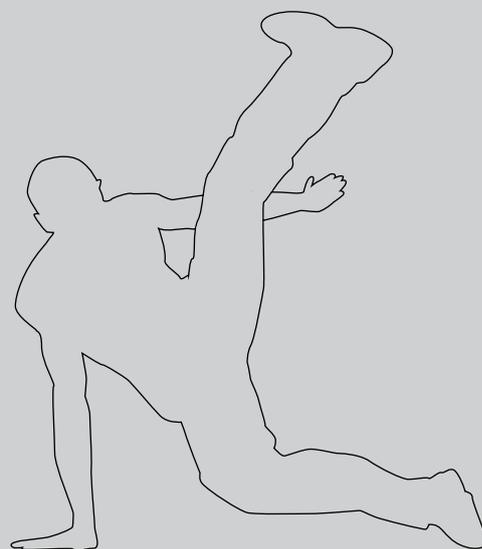
Published references identified through these sources were supplemented by both published and unpublished material located through website searches.

The focus of the search was on issues affecting youth work and the youth worker workforce, rather than the nature of youth work practice.

## 1.2 Structure of the review

While there are common issues facing the youth work sector in New Zealand, Australia and the UK, each country approaches and defines these issues differently. In this report, material is organised by country of origin so that issues for each country are as clear as possible.

The conclusion draws these issues together and attempts to evaluate the relevance that policies and strategies from other countries have for New Zealand.



## 2.0 the youth work sector in New Zealand

### 2.1 The origins of organised youth work in New Zealand

Since the YMCA was first established in New Zealand in 1855 and up until the 1960s, youth work in the pakeha community was largely led by Christian-based, youth-focused organisations such as the Boys' and Girls' Brigades, Scouts and Guides.

Youth work was largely about providing positive social and recreational opportunities for young people with a Christian focus. In the early 1960s, some of these organisations joined to form the National Youth Council, which provided an umbrella organisation for their activities and, for the first time, a public "voice" for youth.

Perhaps more than any decade, the 1960s brought young people into the public's minds as they challenged previously accepted values and authority. With the emergence of a recognisably different youth culture, came a sense for some that young people were a problem, and one that needed to be addressed.

It became increasingly obvious that the established organisations involved in working with young people were not reaching young Māori, whose visibility was raised by an increasing unemployment rate (Hanna, 1995).

The government's response to growing public concern about the behaviour of some young people was to introduce the Detached Youth Worker Funding Scheme, modelled on a project developed in the UK.

#### 2.1.1 The Detached Youth Worker Funding Scheme (1977)

The first detached youth worker was funded by the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) in 1977. The scheme allowed for youth workers to operate separately from established agencies, and work with young people on their own ground. Over the next five years, 47 projects involving 38 organisations and 55 workers were funded under the scheme.

The four objectives of the Detached Youth Worker Funding Scheme were to:

- co-ordinate the employment of detached youth workers by non-government organisations and local authorities
- provide youth workers to help young people (under 25) whose needs were not being met by existing programmes
- allow detached youth workers to operate away from established agencies and have the flexibility to work with young people on their own ground
- enable detached youth workers to work *with*, not *for*, young people and encourage them to develop their own personal strengths, resources and self-reliance (DIA, 1984).

While these objectives were forward thinking for their time, the scheme almost immediately encountered problems.

From 1978, both unemployment and crime rates started to rise sharply, resulting in more and more young people finding themselves in poor living conditions and in need of support.

A 1984 evaluation of the scheme found that deepening economic and social problems, coupled with an assertion of cultural identity and growing political activism by some young Māori, led to detached youth workers being asked to alleviate problems far beyond their resources. Detached youth workers became associated with radical issues and drew criticism that they were instigating social disharmony rather than helping young people.

Evaluation of the scheme highlighted some of the problems that resulted from trying to fit detached youth work into existing DIA structures and processes. While the evaluation is more than 20 years old, the problems identified herald some of the issues still facing youth work in New Zealand today. These include:

- project documentation giving insufficient guidance for the day-to-day activities of youth workers
- a lack of clarity about what detached youth work involves for the worker and the agency
- poor support for youth workers
- confusion over accountability between DIA, the agency, the youth workers and the community
- no provision for changes in objectives and methods as projects developed
- an artificial distinction between the "project" and the "worker"
- an emphasis on the project rather than the needs of young people
- underutilisation of funds when a "project" has been approved but no worker has been found
- gaps in information leading to delays in processing applications (DIA, 1984, p5).

Despite its problems, the scheme's evaluation team was impressed by the quality of the work being done and recommended expansion of the scheme with improved funding. The evaluation team also recommended a consultative approach to projects, giving priority to those with a more developmental focus, and exposing youth work experience to discussion and debate (DIA, 1984).

#### 2.1.2 Community Project Workers' Scheme

The government's ongoing priority of supporting youth workers working with young people "at risk" was made clear when the Detached Youth Worker Funding Scheme was replaced by the Community Project Workers' Scheme. An evaluation report on crime prevention projects later added to the scheme says:

The Department of Internal Affairs Community Project Workers Scheme focuses on supporting agencies working

with the most alienated groups of at risk young people. Specifically, it provides a salary for a worker to work with youth who do not identify with mainstream organisations.

The scheme operates within a community development framework and works with the at-risk young people in their social and community context (Carr, 2000, p11).

This scheme was more recently renamed the Social Entrepreneur Scheme and then the Community Development Scheme, signalling a significant shift in emphasis away from “at-risk” youth.

### 2.1.3 National Youth Council

For 20 years the National Youth Council was a strong voice for young people and those working with them. But in 1989, the council disbanded for a number of reasons. Although the Ministry of Youth Affairs (the forerunner to MYD) appeared around that time as a new body representing youth interests, youth sector expert David Hanna said in a 1995 review that the demise of the council left a major gap, in that there was no longer a national, non-government organisation to lobby for young people or promote youth work issues.

In the 10 years since, the National Youth Workers Network (NYWN) has emerged as a national organisation working to advance the development and quality of the sector in New Zealand (NYWN, 2006).

## 2.2 A brief history of youth worker training in New Zealand

Few advanced courses designed for youth and community workers have been developed in New Zealand. In the 1970s, the National Youth Council, National YMCA and the Ministry of Recreation and Sport established a two-year course in youth and community work. However, in the early 1980s, government funding was withdrawn and this course was disestablished (DIA, 1996).

Hanna, in his 1995 review of developments in youth work in New Zealand, criticised the government’s decision to withdraw funding from the Diploma in Youth and Community Work and provide it to the Auckland School of Social Work:

The general consensus in the youth work sector was that this action significantly undermined the professional training for youth workers that had been provided by the Youth and Community Work Diploma course. Youth work became buried under a social work agenda (Hanna, 1995).

In 1983, following widespread consultation, the New Zealand Social Work Training Council produced a report recommending that youth workers be able to determine their own training needs, through the establishment of regional networks. The government responded with the introduction of the Youth Worker Training Scheme (Hanna, 1995).

### 2.2.1 Youth Worker Training Scheme (1985)

Established in 1985, the DIA Youth Worker Training Scheme is still offered today.

The scheme distributes \$200,000 a year in small grants to meet the informal training needs of youth workers and their employers.

A youth worker, in the context of the Scheme, is someone who paid or unpaid, assists young people to identify and meet their needs and aspirations and make a satisfactory transition to adult life ([www.dia.govt.nz](http://www.dia.govt.nz)).

### 2.2.2 Youth Worker Training Review (1990)

In 1990, under direction from the Labour Government, the then Ministry of Youth Affairs began a review of training available to youth workers. The review arose out of public concern about the state of youth worker training and included wide consultation with youth workers, employers and supervisors, government agencies, training providers and young people.

In this review, a “youth worker” was defined as:

One who works predominantly with young people between the ages of 12 and 25 to co-ordinate services and provide opportunities to enhance young people’s ability to reach their full potential; and

One who regards youth work as their primary occupation (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 1991, p1).

Based on a survey of 233 youth workers, the 1990 review also found that:

- 58% of youth workers were female
- 56% were between 25 and 40 years old
- 51% identified as Pakeha, 23% as Māori and 4% as Pacific Islanders
- 54% had achieved 6th Form Certificate level or higher
- youth workers were equally located in rural, provincial town and large urban areas
- youth workers were employed in a range of government and non-government organisations as paid staff and volunteers
- the majority of non-government organisations supporting youth workers identified themselves as youth, community, church or church-related organisations.

In 1990, training available to youth workers included social work and social science courses available through formal tertiary institutions, government departments and crown agencies. Training courses were also available through community organisations and the DIA Youth Worker Training Scheme.

The training review identified seven issues:

1. All review evidence supported the value of specific training for youth workers.
2. Lack of a structure for developing, co-ordinating and monitoring youth work training.
3. The value of making a distinction between those who work with young people voluntarily, and those who work with young people in compulsory programmes, eg probation, youth justice co-ordinators, etc.
4. The breadth of activities encompassed by professional, semi-professional and volunteer youth workers.
5. The need for different types of training for youth workers including:
  - pre-entry, full time or part time

- on-the-job training
  - distance learning programmes
  - one-off seminars and workshops
  - hui.
6. The need for local training involving formal certification.
  7. The lack of co-ordinated funding for youth workers. Youth workers identified employers' lack of financial support as the major barrier to their accessing training (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 1991).

### 2.2.3 Youth And Community Work Training: An Issues Paper (1996)

In 1996, DIA prepared an issues paper to promote discussion and debate about its role in youth and community work training.

Industry issues identified in the paper included:

- lack of a strong collective identity for youth and community work, and the absence of demand for formal qualifications
- the diversity, informality and variability of standards in most youth and community work training
- ensuring that effective training in Māori approaches to youth and community work were offered
- the challenge of co-ordinating youth and community work training across fields where youth workers operated.

The paper also identified "issues and needs of youth and community workers" including:

- class, cultural and gender barriers led some students to feel uncomfortable in traditional pakeha training institutions
- a strong preference for local training
- the need for a range of training to be available
- the desire of youth and community organisations and networks to be involved in shaping training and accreditation processes
- training providers catered better for community work training than for youth work training.

The report said the one common issue for clients of youth and community workers was that of safety. It said that it was widely acknowledged that some youth and community workers were unsafe, in that they tried to work with problems they were not qualified to address and should have referred to others. It also promoted the need for a code of ethics.

The report identified three issues for DIA. These were:

- that most current training does not lead to qualifications
- a need for stronger and clearer links with the Ministry of Education over training pathways
- a need for flexibility in central policy to respond to the different requirements and existing provision in regions.

The 1996 paper also concluded that:

1. Cost is a significant barrier to youth workers accessing training.
  - Compared with other professions, youth and community work does not offer workers the financial security that encourages high investment in training.

- Employing organisations often run on low budgets and government funders are not specific about the qualifications expected of staff and volunteers.
  - The training environment encourages diversity in the provision of training. Private training establishments are largely expected to survive on a commercial basis.
2. There is poor understanding of the new approach to qualifications established through the New Zealand Qualifications Authority National Qualifications Framework.
  3. Rural and isolated areas are not well served with training opportunities for youth and community workers (DIA, 1996).

### 2.2.4 Youth work: A guide to professional training (2000)

In 2000, the Ministry of Youth Affairs published a guide about the professional training of youth workers. This emphasised the importance of training for youth workers and identified the main pathways to formal qualifications. This included a degree course through a university or polytechnic, or a national certificate or diploma in youth work offered through some polytechs and private training establishments.

The publication also included a range of other training opportunities, such as short courses, non-formal training and staff training by youth organisations, some of which led to qualifications recognised by the sector (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2000).

## 2.3 Youth work in New Zealand

The report, *Real Work*, on youth work and youth workers in New Zealand was published by the National Youth Workers Network in February 2006. The purpose of the report is to give an overview of the youth work sector in New Zealand, and the type of services youth workers provide to young people.

The report includes responses from:

- 637 people surveyed who identified themselves as youth workers
- feedback from 56 focus groups
- profiles of typical youth workers throughout New Zealand.

The report defines youth workers as entering the worlds of young people aged 10-24 and contributing to their development by providing services and meeting needs; building relationships; building connections to and participation in communities (NYWN, 2006).

### 2.3.1 Demographics

The authors of the report are careful to point out that the characteristics of the youth workers who participated in the research may not match those of all youth workers in New Zealand. Bearing this in mind, the report reveals that of those surveyed:

- 65% of youth workers were Pakeha/European, 25% were Māori, and 10% were Pacific peoples
- 75% were under age 40, and more than half were under 30

- 50% of those surveyed indicated they entered youth work with no qualifications, while about 7% had qualifications in youth work. The remainder had a diploma, degree or other qualification.

### 2.3.2 Employment

Survey responses showed that:

- almost half of youth workers had been involved in youth work for less than five years, but another quarter had been youth workers for more than 10 years
- a quarter were working full time (30 hours or more)
- more than a third were volunteers
- the median annual wage for a full-time youth worker in 2004 was \$34,000 per year. However, it should be noted that only 93 survey respondents provided figures on their earnings.

When asked what they planned to do in the future, two-thirds of those who responded said they were keen to stay within youth work, related social services or education.

### 2.3.3 The work youth workers do

The report also explores who youth workers work with, and what they do with them. It found that youth workers operate across a range of age groups, with 15-16 year-olds being the most common group. Young Māori are a significant focus for youth workers nationally.

While the proportion of Pacific youth workers in the sample appeared to broadly match the proportion of Pacific young people in the population, the report found there were relatively few Asian young people involved in youth projects, and even fewer Asian youth workers.

Youth workers, both paid and unpaid, vary in the amount of time they spend in contact with young people each week. Paid youth workers reported spending anything from five or less hours a week in contact with young people, up to more than 15 hours a week.

Two-thirds of unpaid youth workers reported spending 10 or fewer hours a week with young people. There was no clear style of work favoured by youth workers, with participants reporting time fairly evenly spread between:

- structured work with small groups (up to about eight people)
- structured work with large groups
- structured one-on-one work
- unstructured time
- other activities.

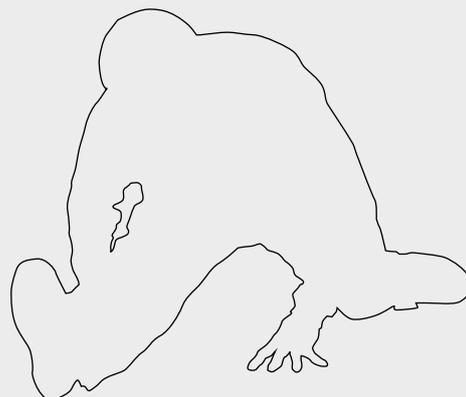
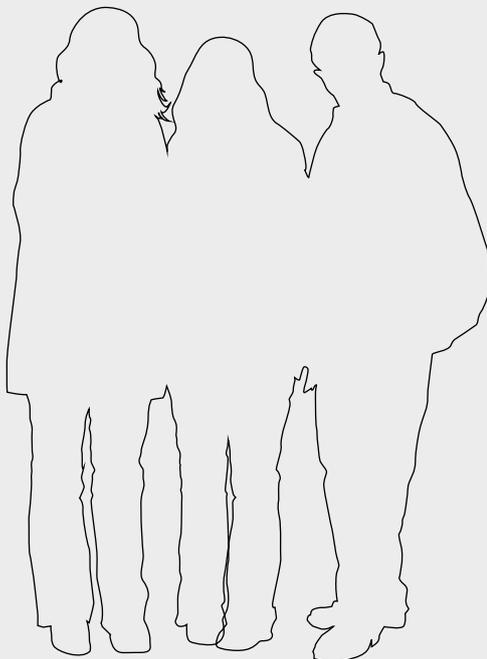
About a third of the youth workers surveyed were working in schools, although only a very small number were employed by them. About a quarter were church-based, and another quarter worked out of purpose-designed youth facilities, such as drop-in centres, skate parks or other areas.

When not spending time with young people, youth workers' time was taken up with administration, networking and liaison, staff management, other paid employment and personal study (NYWN, 2006).

## 2.4 Summary of issues in New Zealand

This review of the history and characteristics of the youth worker workforce in New Zealand, clearly shows that while New Zealand has had a distinct youth work sector for more than 30 years, the sector has struggled through lack of:

- a national policy framework to guide the direction of youth work and the development of the youth work sector
- a united voice through a national association or other professional body
- a strong trade union to advocate for pay and employment conditions for members
- a widely accepted code of ethics to guide practice
- high quality, accessible training to strengthen the quality of practice and the status of youth work.



## 3.0 issues facing the youth work sector in Australia

A recent issue of *Youth Studies Australia* (Vol 23, No 4, 2004) gives a clear picture of the issues facing the youth work sector in Australia.

### 3.1 Professionalisation

In the introduction to his paper in *Youth Studies*, Howard Sercombe – a youth worker, researcher and academic in the youth studies area – writes:

Youth work today is at a crossroads. Are the factors that make youth work such a unique and effective service the same ones that will be sacrificed if it is professionalised? Or are the problems besetting the occupation 'untouchable' without a professional structure, and are the benefits of professionalisation too important to defer the process any longer (Sercombe, 2004, p20)?

Historically, youth workers have been suspicious of professionalisation for a number of reasons. Many come into youth work without formal qualifications and fear that professionalisation will reduce their opportunities to do the work they are drawn to.

With its inevitable push towards standards of practice, there is concern that professionalised youth work will leave no place for effective, but unconventional styles of working with young people. Youth workers have long resisted being organised, as they value autonomy and initiative.

Perhaps youth workers' strongest reservation is that they take pride in their role as advocates for young people against institutions of power, which are viewed with some suspicion. But Sercombe says that while youth workers are viewed as protecting the interests of young people, they may also use this unique position to improve their own status, which can come at the expense of their clients (Sercombe, 1997a, 2004).

However, there are those pushing for youth work to become more professionalised, standardised and formalised.

Some youth workers and others continue to report incidents and methods which do not reflect good practice, and are at times seriously unethical. Youth workers are also often marginalised in discussions among other professionals, because of their lack of professional status. Their knowledge and expertise is frequently dismissed, limiting their ability to effectively advocate for young people.

Another major incentive for professionalisation, has been the growing interest of government funders in bringing the youth work

sector under governance. A general change in funding, from grants to contracts for services, means youth work agencies and others have increasingly become agents for government. As governments become more particular about their expectations, without a clear professional position, it has been difficult for the youth work sector to argue against imposed expectations or obligations (Sercombe, 2004).

Sercombe describes the arguments for and against professionalisation as "the professionalisation dilemma". While professions have an ethical commitment to their clients, they also operate in the interests of their members. These two dimensions can come into conflict when professions' moves to advance the interests of their members are at the expense of clients (Sercombe, 2004).

Despite reservations, Sercombe finds in favour of professionalisation of youth work:

The choice is between the risk of institutional corruption at the hands of the profession, which can then at least be named and challenged, or the random corruptions of a situation where it is difficult for it even to be named (Sercombe, 2004, p25).

#### 3.1.1 Professional associations

Professional associations typically incorporate a body of knowledge about a field of practice. Some professions require membership of a professional association; while for others, registration is voluntary. What they have in common is that professional associations are concerned with the governance and self-regulation of those who belong to an identified area of practice.

J Bessant, Professor of Youth Studies and Sociology at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, identifies the pros and cons of a professional body for youth workers.

The advantages of a professional body are that it can:

- serve the interests of members and still indirectly serve the interests of young people and the public
- represent members and advocate for reasonable pay and conditions
- provide important political support and advocacy for institutions and services critical to youth work by lobbying government and other key players
- provide a unified voice and sense of solidarity to the sector

- increase the status of youth work, benefiting workers and young people through improved services, workloads etc
- prevent people from misrepresenting their work history and qualifications
- raise the formal education level of youth workers
- increase research into youth work (Bessant, 2004a).

The disadvantages of a professional body are that it can:

- put members' priorities ahead of the young people they work with
- undermine the ability of communities to care for their own young people
- claim exclusive expertise in responding to youth problems, undermining other forms of knowledge, skill and self-help
- monopolise power and expand territory
- push for accepted styles of practice at the expense of unorthodox but effective methods
- promote the overuse of services (Bessant, 2004a).

In her article *Up periscope: The future for youth work in Australia*, Bessant says Australian youth workers must form a professional association – backed by a legal requirement for registration – if they are to build a professional status and gain public confidence.

She believes a national statutory body would take the sector a long way towards ensuring that youth workers have access to quality education, as tertiary institutes and other training providers would have to meet the specifications of the professional body.

Regulation of practice would, in her view, protect youth workers and young people, as well as develop the sector, improve expertise, and enhance professional credibility (Bessant, 2004b).

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria says that professional associations fall into one of three categories – those with an industrial relations focus; those with a professional development focus; and those which combine the two.

It says a professional youth work association with an industrial focus would:

- represent the industrial relations interests of members
- work to improve conditions of employment and pay
- protect members' occupational health and safety rights
- support members and provide legal assistance on employment-related issues.

A youth work association with a professional development focus would:

- promote the profession of youth work
- promote professional standards and good practice in the sector
- foster opportunities for professional advancement.

A combined model would:

- co-ordinate activity on professional and industrial relations issues
- promote the profession of youth work

- establish, monitor and improve practice standards
- preserve the legal and industrial interests of practitioners
- promote ethical behaviour in the youth work sector (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc, 2004).

### 3.1.2 Codes of ethics

Most professional associations have a code of ethics to guide the conduct of members. For some, a serious breach of the code of ethics can result in penalties, including the removal of a licence to practice. The development and adoption of a code of ethics has been the focus of much attention in several states of Australia.

Bessant says the advantages of a code of ethics are that it can:

- help articulate core values, acceptable practice and professional boundaries
- provide guidelines in situations of conflict
- help identify and prevent corrupt practices
- set out a duty of care and prevent the abuse of power over young people
- help secure (and restore) public trust in those who work with young people, because internal regulatory processes are seen to be in place
- educate youth workers about good practice
- provide a basis for determining and denouncing unethical conduct.

However, she says some argue a code of ethics is undesirable because it will:

- impose moral requirements
- remove a worker's entitlement to exercise their professional judgement
- be difficult to construct in a way that reflects the values of a multicultural, pluralist society
- not prevent unethical conduct
- be the start of a policing mechanism that may become cumbersome or oppressive (Bessant, 2004a).

### 3.1.3 Accreditation

Accreditation is proof that an education or training institution has met a certain threshold of quality. This official endorsement requires a professional association to judge whether or not a programme adequately prepares a student for entry into the profession.

The arguments in favour of accreditation are that it can:

- help produce graduates with professional competence to practice
- improve the quality of teaching youth work
- give higher status to youth work programmes, making them less vulnerable
- attract "better" students to programmes
- bring some standardisation to the youth work curriculum
- be used by academics to argue for more resources
- ensure that what is taught is relevant to the field.

The arguments against accreditation are that it can:

- be used to control the sector by a specific group whose interest is their current members
- not guarantee improvement of the sector
- be seen as a deeply political process
- advantage well-resourced institutions better able to bear the associated costs
- never be an objective process or equitable across institutions
- lead to the decline of non-accredited programmes
- result in rigidity and an inability to respond to changes and the needs of communities and students
- add considerably to the workload of teaching staff
- incur a substantial cost
- cause or worsen tensions between “the field” and academics
- lead to decisions about education being made by those not expert in the area (Bessant, 2004a).

### 3.1.4 Licensing and regulation

A licence to practice is authorisation by a professional body that typically means a set of requirements have been met by the licence holder. The requirements may include things like recognised educational qualifications, police checks, and in some cases external examinations.

Bessant identifies the following as arguments in favour of a licence to practice:

- it could secure and improve the quality of youth work
- it can help eliminate practices that damage the reputation of youth work
- it can help regulate and co-ordinate the sector
- it can provide some guarantee of a standard of youth work practice to other professionals.

Conversely, a licence to practice:

- does not in itself prevent bad practice
- creates a “closed shop”
- can restrict entry to the field
- may be resisted by the sector if it is not a legislative requirement (Bessant, 2004).

## 3.2 The nature of youth work

Almost every article retrieved for this review includes a discussion of what youth work is.

### 3.2.1 Examining the rhetoric

A 1998 paper that seems both to crystallise and challenge some of the accepted beliefs about youth work is by Australian academic Rick Flowers. He says when youth workers theorise about their practice, they often make statements which are over simplistic.

*Youth workers say they respond to people's needs.*

Flowers says this apparently simple statement belies its complexity, as youth workers challenge expressions of need when they are limiting or self-destructive for young people.

*Youth workers claim to be concerned with and driven by the interests of young people first and foremost.*

Flowers says this statement fails to acknowledge that youth work also serves the interests of parents, police, business and government authorities who may be interested in controlling young people's behaviour. Youth workers “rights based” perspective sometimes rests uneasily with their “soft cop” practice.

He adds:

If youth workers do not acknowledge this complexity, then they cannot effectively negotiate the tension between contesting interests (Flowers, 1998).

*Many youth workers value participatory but authoritarian ways of working with young people.*

This apparent contradiction refers to the tension between youth workers' commitment to youth participation and their actual practice. Flowers provides numerous examples where Australian youth workers have encouraged young people's participation in decision-making, but have largely excluded them from the decisions that most affect them.

*Youth workers have faith that young people who participate in the planning and implementation of projects will learn significant things, and be empowered.*

Flowers says this notion of empowerment is restricted to young people being given limited responsibility. He adds that youth workers need to get better at exploring what empowerment really means, and how they can support it.

*Youth workers have an ambiguous, partially deficit and partially structuralist social analysis.*

While youth workers do not blame young people for their lack of power, they tend to accept that young people do not have the necessary skills, knowledge and qualities to participate in decision-making. Too often, Flowers says, youth workers:

. . . discuss the structural disadvantages which face many young people but concentrate on helping young people to change themselves rather than social structures (Flowers, 1998).

*Youth workers place value on helping young people learn in ways that are informal, flexible and creative.*

However, Flowers says, youth workers are often vague about how this process works. There is an implicit and unchallenged assumption that working with young people in formal and systematic ways is less effective than more informal and creative methods.

*Youth workers believe that effective informal education depends on strong relationships, talking and listening.*

Flowers says:

Youth workers are often happy to assume the role of facilitator of learning, but in the process may relinquish the responsibility of ensuring that what is learnt is meaningful. On the other hand, helping young people learn new views and knowledge,

and challenging young people to imagine alternative views to their current ones, is fraught with the risk of being, or at least seen as being, didactic and domineering. But if a youth worker is not there to help people learn a range of views and knowledge, what are they there for (Flowers, 1998)?

*Youth workers are more interested in how people learn than in what they learn.*

A common assertion made by youth workers is that the outcome of a project is less important than active participation, but workers are vague when asked about the nature of the learning and the benefits young people derive from participation.

Flowers concludes his paper by saying that youth workers need to develop better theoretical frameworks to explain their practice.

V Wong, writing in *Youth Studies Australia* in 2004, also argues that youth workers need to critically review their ideology and practice. Wong says they need to be clear on whether they are “personalists”, providing services to address individual or family issues, or whether they are “structuralists”, working to change the structures within which problems emerge and develop (Wong, 2004).

### 3.2.2 Youth Work In Changing Times

Bessant identifies a number of changes in society which are impacting on the youth work sector, including:

- **The changing status and experience of young people.** Youth work is still highly oriented to young people represented as “trouble” or “at risk”. Publicly-funded youth work will continue to provide services targeted to young people who meet these definitions. Youth workers need more capacity to recognise when young people are being labelled and remain alert to young people’s own definitions of their situations.
- **The changing nature of work.** Liberal policies have led to the cutback and closure of youth work services, contracting out of services, and a strong emphasis on minimising costs. Core human service values and practices are under threat from “managerialism”.
- **Poverty and social exclusion.** The issue of child and youth poverty remains a persistent problem.
- **Ageing population.** The increasing age profile of the population will have the effect of reducing the proportion of resources available to young people.
- **Environmental sustainability.** In this and many other social movements, young people are at the forefront. Youth work needs to connect with new youth cultures and help overturn stereotypes of young people as individualistic, apolitical, apathetic and disengaged.
- **Globalisation.** Communications technology has seen new patterns of global economic, political and cultural activity. Youth workers need to be able to meet the challenges of the global information age.
- **Dependency and rights.** Many young people are financially, socially and emotionally dependent on adults, and easily become subject to mismanagement and neglect. The biggest challenge of all is for youth workers to find ways to promote discussion about young people’s rights (Bessant, 2004b).

In a 2003 paper, J Bessant and R Webber explore the changing nature of youth work with a small sample of Australian youth workers.

They reported:

- an increasing sense of poor job security resulting from contracting out of services
- a push towards generalist practice and generic service provision, as cut-backs mean the amalgamation of smaller specialist services
- preventative programmes becoming increasingly uncommon, and crisis intervention programmes spreading
- an increasing proportion of time being absorbed into management and administrative tasks
- advocacy being squeezed out in favour of other “outputs” (Bessant and Webber, 2003).

### 3.2.3 A Clash Of Values

In their 2004 paper *Youth work: challenging the soft cop syndrome*, Australian academics Scott Poynting and Rob White explore the challenges youth workers face when increasingly they work for central and local governments or government-funded agencies.

They argue that the prevailing values of youth work – equity, empowerment and advocacy for the marginalised, disadvantaged and excluded – can easily conflict with the values of a “fundamentally inegalitarian” state.

Poynting and White say this clash of values is encapsulated in different interpretations of youth “at risk”. On one hand, “at risk” identifies those in danger of becoming or remaining marginalised or disadvantaged. On the other hand, “at risk” is applied to those who are perceived to be a risk to the community and public order.

The issue is how the workplace affects the ability of youth workers to put their values into practice. The authors write:

... how will progressive youth workers working in a political and ideological climate that stresses individualistic solutions to social inequalities and disparities ... engage in the tasks of building community solidarity, fighting racism and sexism, responding to the crises of masculinity and so on? Will the politics of social justice and social change give way to the contingent values of pragmatism (Poynting and White, 2004, p45).

They conclude that the key challenge for youth work is to continuously create environments in which the widest possible variety of interventions can be achieved.

Sercombe, in a 1997 paper, explored similar issues. He says youth work is torn over the question of whether it is young people or institutions that are responsible for young people’s alienation, and who should be the target for repair. Furthermore, youth workers who engage with marginalised young people can themselves become marginalised, because of their critique of society’s mainstream institutions (Sercombe, 1997b).

## 3.3 Responses from Australian states

Sercombe writes that while countries across the world are “groping their way towards professionalisation” of youth work, progress in Australia has been slow.

In Australia, “peak bodies” are key organisations representing specific sector groups<sup>1</sup>. Youth affairs peak bodies are not

<sup>1</sup>National Library of Australia. Peak Bodies Forum definition

professional associations nor, he says, should they be. However, advancement of the debate has fallen to them. Currently, peak bodies are working with varying intensity to move the debate along. Sercombe has summarised progress to date in each state.

### 3.3.1 Victoria

Forums on professionalisation were convened in 2003 and 2004 by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. An ongoing working group has been set up to facilitate the establishment of a professional association of youth workers (Sercombe, 2004; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004).

### 3.3.2 Western Australia

The Fairbridge Code of Ethics, developed by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, was endorsed as the voluntary standard for the youth work field in October 2003, and implemented by the Council through a series of workshops and forums (Sercombe, 2004).

### 3.3.3 New South Wales

The Fairbridge Code of Ethics has received considerable support, as has the concept of adopting a state-wide or nationwide code of ethics. The Youth Action and Policy Association NSW is undertaking consultations on this code of ethics (Sercombe, 2004).

### 3.3.4 Queensland

Following vigorous debate in 1998 over the development of a professional association and adoption of a code of ethics, little more has happened (Sercombe, 2004).

### 3.3.5 South Australia

The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia has developed a standard policy manual for use by the field. There seems to be less concern about adopting a code of ethics or establishing a professional association (Sercombe, 2004).

### 3.3.6 Australian Capital Territory

The Youth Coalition of the Australian Capital Territory has led presentations on the Fairbridge Code of Ethics, and in 2004 was working towards ratification of the code as the standard for youth work practice (Sercombe, 2004).

### 3.3.7 Tasmania and Northern Territory

The key issue in these states is the availability of training for youth workers and poor resourcing for youth work development in both jurisdictions (Sercombe, 2004).

Work being undertaken towards a new Youth Policy Framework for the Northern Territory is described on the website at: [www.nt.gov.au](http://www.nt.gov.au)

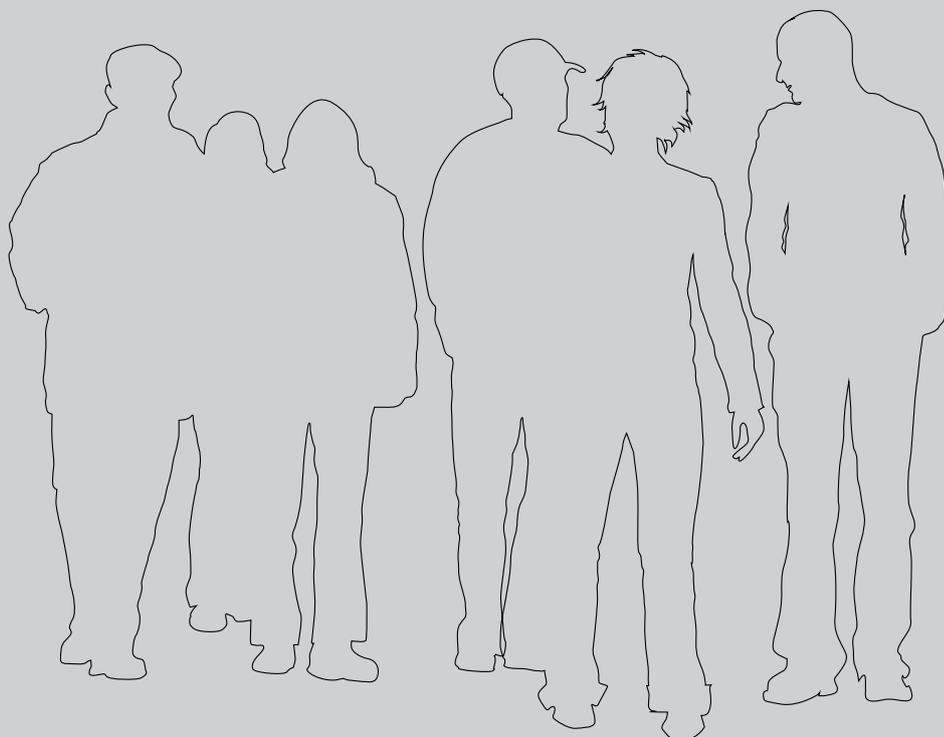
## 3.4 Summary of issues in Australia

Professionalisation of youth work is being widely discussed in Australia, but a lack of organisation of the sector is hindering national debate. In the absence of any federal body or federal policy which attempts to define youth work, the debate appears to be led by youth work academics and practitioners. The extent to which forums have been convened for discussion on professionalisation varies from state to state.

Although no papers expressly opposing professionalism were retrieved for this review, it is clear that there is strong suspicion that pressure to move towards professionalisation is self-serving, and will shift youth workers' focus away from having young people's interests as their guiding principle.

There seems to be consensus that youth workers need to better articulate who they are and what they do, and that the dangers of a lack of rigour in defining youth work practice have been spelt out by several commentators.

There is growing support around Australia for state-wide or national codes of ethics.



## 4.0 issues facing the youth work sector in the United Kingdom

It is suggested that youth work is currently experiencing a dangerous moment in which the very aspects of the work that make it attractive to policy-makers could be undermined by policy, and that it is therefore urgent that practitioners articulate more clearly the specific nature of their practice (Spence, 2004, p264).

In the UK the government has taken an active role in shaping youth policy, and with it youth work. Much of the recent literature retrieved for this review critiques the policy and its implications for youth work practice.

### 4.1 Youth services

“Youth services” is a term for services provided by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), the statutory sector and a range of voluntary organisations which receive government funding. Youth services have for many years provided informal personal and social education for young people. They help young people prepare for adult life by:

- acquiring social skills
- helping them to become responsible citizens and
- preparing them for the world of work.

The priority age group for these services is 13 to 19-year-olds, but in some cases the target age may extend from 11 to 25-year-olds. Provision is usually in the form of youth clubs and centres, or through “detached” or outreach work aimed at young people at risk from alcohol, drug abuse, or crime ([www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk)).

Historically, LEAs have varied in their commitment to providing youth services, with Strathclyde, Sheffield and the Inner London Education Authority committing the most resources to youth services (Nicholls, 1999).

### 4.2 The Connexions strategy

In 2000, the UK Government launched the Connexions strategy, billed as “supporting young people in England as they move from adolescence to adulthood”. The strategy was promoted as bringing together existing and future government youth policies into one coherent strategy for the first time (Department for Education and Employment, 2000, p32).

Writing in 1999, T Jeffs and M Smith foreshadowed policy shifts in the direction taken by Connexions when they commented on how politicians and policy-makers tended to talk about young people either as thugs responsible for crime and vandalism; as users of drugs and alcohol; or as victims raised in dysfunctional families, who received poor schooling or were unable to find work.

Jeffs and Smith wrote:

A view of ‘youth as a problem’ continues to drive policy discussion and in the UK at least is linked to notions of social exclusion, and the ‘answer’ to this behaviour is to impose more control on the one hand, and on the other to direct ‘remedial’ resources and interventions to those deemed to be in need (Jeffs and Smith, 1999).

The Connexions strategy has four key themes, three of which relate broadly to supporting young people’s involvement in education. The fourth theme to provide “outreach, information, advice, support and guidance”, was to be met through the establishment of the Connexions Service.

At the heart of the Connexions strategy will be the new Connexions Service. This Service will provide a radical new approach to guiding and supporting all young people through their teenage years and in their transition to adulthood and working life.

The new Service will be delivered primarily through a network of Personal Advisers linking in with specialist support services. They will be drawn together from a range of existing public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, and build on best practice.

These organisations will come together to form new Connexions Partnerships to develop and coordinate the delivery of support services for young people (Department for Education and Employment, 2000, p32).

#### 4.2.1 Critiquing The Connexions strategy

The launch of the Connexions strategy and service caused much debate in the UK about the nature of youth work and its relationship to government policy. Jean Spence, a university lecturer in youth and community work, wrote this:

The advent of the Connexions Service for young people stimulated an altogether unfamiliar experience for youth work in England and Wales, moving it from the margins towards the centre of youth policy (Spence, 2004, p261).

##### Targeting

Spence noted in 2004 that Connexions, devised to “help young people through the transition from adolescence to adulthood”, was ostensibly a universal service, but from the outset was targeted much more towards those identified as “not in education, employment or training” (who became known by the acronym NEET).

She says that “financial incentives have seduced cash-starved youth workers into collusion”, but that problem-focused targeting and emphasis on transitions and outcomes has created difficulties for them (Spence, 2004).

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned an 18-month research project to assess the possibilities for detached and outreach youth work within the new policy environment.

The 2004 summary report of the research found that while some street-based project workers were working effectively within the Connexions framework, in the case of harder to reach or more challenging young people, street work interventions need to be more flexible than envisaged by the strategy. The researchers concluded that:

- The government needs to be far clearer about its expectations of Connexions workers. It also needs to be clearer about the degree of flexibility it is prepared to grant them and their partners, if they are to link effectively with street-based work.
- The success of an intervention may be dictated by the time it takes for the young person to gain sufficient confidence and maturity, rather than by a cut-off point set by funding or project goals.
- There is tension between the sometimes difficult processes of street-based youth work and the potentially more confrontational fire-fighting role that workers are sometimes

expected to fulfil. There is a greater need for clarity about the nature of the street-worker role and the degree of control they are able to exert (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004a).

##### Conception of youth work

Spence, one of the researchers involved in the Rowntree research, found three areas where policy potentially conflicted with the realities and ideals of youth work practice. These were relationships, partnerships and time.

Ideal youth work relationships are voluntary and have a value base that stresses mutual trust, justice and equality. As far as possible, young people and youth workers engage as equals.

While “services” and “outcomes” are important, they are only part of the picture, and there are always aspects of youth work that cannot be controlled or planned for. The requirement to monitor, record and count “achievements” can undermine development of meaningful relationships, or lead to duplicity in recording outcomes.

Rather than prioritising relationships, Spence says, Connexions prioritises “networks”. It assumes the youth worker will mobilise a range of connected and equal professions to achieve the best outcome for clients. The young person’s agenda is relevant only if it relates to the achievement of approved outcomes in education, training, employment and citizenship. The idea of youth workers working in partnership with a young person to determine their own outcomes does not appear.

Youth work, particularly detached and outreach youth work, is time intensive. Youth workers must move at a pace appropriate to young people, and successful interventions often require patient and sustained work.

The requirement to quantify and measure progress as part of the Connexions approach may lead to a mismatch between what is happening and what is recorded, and also undermine youth workers’ confidence in their understanding of what is important.

However, the report on the research also points out that if youth work is to resist being defined as something it is not, the sector must get better at defining what it is.

Successful youth work practice involves risk. There is risk in the personal elements of the relationships, in the impossibility of micro-management, and in the need to trust long-term benefits which cannot be predetermined.

... Until youth workers themselves are able to develop a language that articulates practice in their own terms, it is likely that even recordings [of outcomes] will fail to reflect the theories of practice (Spence, 2004, p270).

The Informal Education Homepage (INFED) has also provided a strong critique of the model of youth work promoted by Connexions. Like Spence, it acknowledges that the “threat” posed by Connexions’ definition of youth work may be the push that is needed for youth work organisations to better define their work.

An independent and not-for-profit website put together by a small group of educators, INFED aims to provide a space for people to explore informal education and lifelong learning. In particular, INFED aims “to encourage educators to develop ways of working and being that foster association, conversation and relationships” (www.infed.org).

Scottish academic M Smith, in an article posted on INFED, argues that youth work is threatened by Connexions, because the strategy and associated service does not support “open” youth work that has no preconceived outcomes. This is because:

- The strategy focuses on the individual rather than the group, and does not prioritise supporting groups to explore, define and address their own interests and concerns.
- It looks to “problem” young people rather than young people as a whole. This means resources are redirected away from the majority of young people who do not pose a threat to public order or economic development towards those “facing substantial multiple problems”.
- There is an emphasis on casework rather than education. Connexions promotes a model where youth workers work with individuals in a specific school, or on a Connexions defined issue. The guidance aspect of working with young people is given priority over traditional youth work approaches.
- Connexions is not essentially concerned with fostering conversations with young people. Rather than engaging with young people, it looks to change them in predefined ways.
- There is a sense of surveillance and control. Connexions aims to establish a national monitoring programme that tracks the activities of all young people, and updating a database is part of the core function of personal advisors. The aim is to channel youth behaviour along certain lines and fit with other government policies for young people.
- The strategy proposes youth workers should work to state-set targets. Connexions establishes targets for personal advisors to meet, and funding depends on these being met. Although an increase in the contract culture has made youth and community workers familiar with targets, Connexions reflects a strong push towards standardising practice.
- There is a danger that the strategy will rob youth work of resources. Connexions is funded by taking almost all of the Careers Service budget and about 40% of the Youth Service budget. Pressure has been placed on the National Lottery Charities Board to fund only youth work that serves the Connexions strategy. There will be an inevitable loss of funds to open and developmental youth work.

However, Smith says that Connexions also brings opportunities to youth work, because:

- It creates an opportunity to rethink and redefine youth work. The implementation of a particular model of youth work with which many are not comfortable provides the sector

with motivation to better define their practice around young people. This includes special and unique elements that mark out quality work with young people.

- It provides an opportunity to develop alternatives. The strategy’s focus on educational achievement and encouraging young people into prescribed pathways leaves many outside its reach. These young people will need a different form of support, and youth work agencies need to rise to the challenge of providing it.
- It offers a chance to consolidate resources for youth work outside Connexions. Much of the money for youth work comes directly from young people and their parents, carers or local organisations. Much of the labour that sustains youth work is voluntary, and many of those who support the sector are more likely to turn to areas of work they believe do not receive significant government attention.
- The strategy should encourage youth workers to participate in, and even lead, the debate about whether the directions and priorities of Connexions support the society we want (Smith, 2000).

### Managerialism

Smith is highly critical of the managerialism underlying Connexions in his 2005 paper *Transforming Youth Work*. He resists what he sees as Connexions’ key premise – that success in life is tied to achieving qualifications and securing employment – as it offers no exploration of what constitutes human wellbeing.

You will search in vain for any mention of spiritual well-being, and for any discussion of moral and ethical questions . . . what we have here is a limited and limiting view of young people, and of human well-being generally. Not only are fundamental areas of human experience overlooked or quietly forgotten, young people are essentially viewed as objects to be acted upon (or ‘delivered’ to) (Smith, 2005).

The Connexions approach is to “attach individuals to education and learning systems”, and the focus is on those experiencing difficulty in the “transition to adult life”. Smith says that the strategy does this by:

- strengthening inspection and monitoring of services for young people
- streamlining and rationalising services and creating “partnerships” with voluntary youth organisations (partnerships Smith says are not equal)
- emphasising focused interventions to keep young people on predetermined pathways
- control of the curriculum for youth work training.

He concludes his paper by saying this about Connexions:

The strategy is fundamentally wrong on several counts. It remains individualistic and anti-associational in orientation; it looks to contain youth; and its belief in ‘joined-up thinking’ and control through ‘partnership’ would simply stifle innovation and lead to a great deal of inappropriate work.

Luckily for young people, and informal educators, the government’s ability to affect what happens in many agencies is limited . . . there are extensive resources for

work with young people that lie outside the Connexions strategy; there are signs that the crude instrumentalism that has underpinned government intervention is beginning to be recognised as deeply flawed, and that the internal tensions within the strategy will lead, in the medium term, to its abandonment (Smith, 2005).

Writing in 2004, senior youth and community worker Jeremy Brent, articulates dissatisfaction with the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed) targets, products and outcomes for youth work that have flowed from government policy.

But, like others, he says youth workers can only hope to challenge SMART outcomes if they are better able to articulate the outcomes of their work with young people. It is not enough, he says, for youth workers to claim that their relationship with young people is so special that it provides complete justification of their work.

Through presentation of two case studies of work with young people, Brent concludes that:

- youth work is not about meeting predetermined targets. Targets are not necessary for positive outcomes, and a lack of them can actually allow for powerful outcomes
- the lack of targets helps young people learn about creation and transformation. Not having a predetermined outcome allows young people to create solutions for themselves and learn from the process
- young people learn as much about themselves through action as discussion
- accreditation should not be confused with achievement. Much that is worthwhile achieving does not come with a certificate
- youth work is organised and professional. Being without targets does not mean being disorganised; flexibility and responsiveness are vital pre-requisites to engaging with young people
- youth work benefits the individual and also serves the public good.

Brent concludes:

Youth workers are increasingly in the uncomfortable position of being squeezed between a managerialist approach, which demands targeted results and certificated outcomes, and our awareness that transferring this type of directive relationship on to the young people we work with would undermine the value of what we do.

We are a kind of kink in the chain of command. To counter that pressure, we have to continually articulate, for ourselves and others, why it is that our informal and non-managerial relationships with young people are so valuable (Brent, 2004, p73).

Additional research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2004 explored the nature of inter-agency partnerships – one of the guiding principles behind the Connexions' strategy.

The researchers acknowledged that while the strategy was still in its infancy, staff in partner agencies were confused about the role played by Connexions personal advisers and unclear about their responsibilities and authority.

Some personal advisers found providers difficult to work with because of conflicting priorities and work practices, as well as little systematic or effective information sharing (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004b).

### 4.3 National Youth Work Strategy (Scotland)

Scotland is currently consulting on the structure and content of a National Youth Work Strategy, to ensure the delivery of quality youth work at national and local level. Although the strategy has not yet been finalised, its aims are to ensure:

- that every young person has the opportunity to influence and benefit from youth work services, and should be involved in the development, delivery and monitoring of their own local youth services
- a "resemblance" between local and national services to remove access barriers
- greater co-operation within the sector, so that young people can readily move around the system and access the information they need
- that there are opportunities for flexibility to meet local needs and innovation to stimulate change.

The strategy is designed to address seven key issues:

- the need for continuity of funding, and to improve existing funding processes
- developing better career paths for youth workers, including extending and strengthening training
- empowering young people by creating opportunities for their voices to be heard
- increasing the number and range of safe and stimulating meeting places for young people
- co-ordination of activities and services
- sharing and extending best practice
- ensuring that relevant legislation, including laws to protect the health and safety of young people, are observed to create safe and secure environments
- the need to better articulate the aims and outcomes of youth work and measure practice against them (Youthlink Scotland, 2004).

### 4.4 Trade unions

The Community and Youth Workers Union (CYWU) is active in promoting youth work as a profession.

In an address to policy-makers from the United States (US) youth sector in 2003, CYWU General Secretary Doug Nicholls described how the union sought to establish youth work as a profession, and guarantee some standards in the curriculum and delivery of training courses.

The CYWU understood youth work as a way of working with young people that was unlike teaching or providing social welfare support, but a job which "took young people on their own terms". This job was seen as important as teaching, and therefore deserving of similar status. It should also be supported by quality training, and paid comparably to other professions.

Initially, large university departments brought proposals for youth worker training courses to the CYWU, which established a committee to ratify courses. However, it became apparent that the qualifications weren't respected by employers and that there were widely different rates of pay for the same occupation.

In 1961, the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Youth and Community Workers was formed, bringing together all employers of youth workers. As employers and representatives of the workforce, the JNC plays an active role in setting the pay and conditions for youth workers, as well as approving training courses.

The JNC works with guidelines that set core competencies and learning outcomes that constitute youth work practice and delivery. Any student graduating from an accredited youth work training course is entitled to receive JNC negotiated pay and conditions.

There are four different sets of guidelines for training:

- pre-entry training and education – two years in England, three years in Wales, and four years in Scotland (and most of Europe)
- part-time youth workers training – after which they receive guidelines and a certificate to practice. There are eight part-time workers for every full-time youth worker in Scotland
- training for voluntary organisations, all their volunteers and staff
- guidelines for professional development and in-service training.

Despite this apparently well-developed system, Nicholls told the policy makers that it still had two main weaknesses:

- No licence to practice, only a voluntary agreement between employers, local authorities, government and the workforce. There are no required qualifications for work with young people.
- Provision of services for young people is not mandated in law. A 1944 law says that local authorities must provide "adequate facilities" for young people, but neither "facilities" nor "adequate" are defined.

Nicholls closed his speech by saying that the CYWU wanted a national code of ethics for youth workers, which if ignored, meant the worker could no longer work with young people (Nicholls, 2003).

The CYWU website contains numerous papers on different aspects of professionalism and the need for a strong trade union ([www.cywu.org.uk](http://www.cywu.org.uk)).

#### 4.5 The future of youth work

In looking at why youth policy in the UK became more concerned with extending control and management, rather than helping young people realise their potential, T Jeffs and M Smith (1999) suggest that the use of the word "youth" has created a problem for youth work.

They say that terms like adolescent, teenager, young person and youth are often used interchangeably, but in subtly different ways.

"Adolescence" tends to be linked to ideas of personal identity and behaviour, with a focus on age-specific development problems, insecurity and uncertainty.

"Teenager" is more upbeat and is often bracketed with age-specific forms of consumption. It is often linked with words like "fashion" and "magazines".

"Young person" tends to be used to show status, for example Young Person's Railcard.

"Youth" is largely used to describe the behaviour of young people in the public eye, and is commonly linked to words such as crime, culture and policy. "Youth" has also taken on a mainly masculine and negative connotation, with "marginalised" and "disaffected youth" conjuring up images of males loitering in shopping malls and behaving in unacceptable ways.

By contrast, "teenager" has a more feminine association, eg early childbearing is consistently referred to as teenage pregnancy and never as youth pregnancy.

Jeffs and Smith say this shows that the basis for "youth" work appears to be a model of young people in deficit, which young people themselves aspire to leave behind. In this lengthy paper, they go on to explore the sociology of youth, and the changing nature of society and adulthood.

They conclude that youth work is a term that has become less useful as times have changed:

All this adds up to the need to come to terms with the fact that the notion of youth work has a decreasing usefulness. Those seeking to hang on to it as an operating idea, appear to be harking back to understandings that have more to do with the 1950s and 1960s and before, than with contemporary experience.

'Youth workers' need to unhook themselves from a focus on youth and young people and instead look to people's experiences and aspirations in the totality (Jeffs and Smith, 1999).

#### 4.6 Summary of issues in the United Kingdom

The introduction of the Connexions strategy has been a catalyst for strong debate about the nature of youth work, and the merits of having the youth worker role determined by central government policy.

As one commentator observed, in 2001 youth work in the UK suddenly and rather uncomfortably found itself at the heart of a government policy, rather than on the fringes and ignored.

The aim of the Connexions strategy is to link young people into education, and equip them to fit into existing social structures and expectations. There is concern from the sector that the policy is too narrowly focused, and that it offers little for marginalised young people who may have their access to services further reduced.

Connexions has provoked some strong criticism, and prompted calls for youth workers – not the government – to define what they do and to reaffirm their commitment to working creatively with young people whose links with society are weak.

Youth work in the UK is supported by a strong and active trade union, which negotiates pay and employment conditions for members. It also plays a key role in accrediting youth worker training courses, and has established links between graduation from accredited courses and pay and conditions.

## 5.0 youth worker training in the United States

A small amount of material retrieved for this review originates from the United States (US).

A brief review of US-based website: [www.youthwork.com/ywindex](http://www.youthwork.com/ywindex) and related links, shows the diversity of interpretations of youth work in the US. With services offered at federal, state and local levels, it is not useful to generalise about the nature of youth work in the US, or the prevailing issues.

### 5.1 Training and development for youth workers

Two papers retrieved for this review are of interest, because they address the issue of staff development for youth workers through a youth development model.

#### 5.1.1 Building Exemplary Systems For Training Youth Workers (BEST)

An evaluation of the Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (BEST) scheme shows that since 1996, more than 5000 youth workers have participated in professional development activities in their communities.

The evaluation was undertaken by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), which promotes itself as “an independent non-profit organisation committed to solving critical social problems in the US and around the world”.

Based on AED’s curriculum, developed with funding from the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BEST introduces youth workers to the youth development approach and looks at its implications on their work.

The training programme comprises seven four-hour sessions that include:

- **An introduction to youth development.** Where youth workers reflect on their own experiences as young people, and recognise the importance of youth work in the lives of young people. They also learn some of the core concepts and language of youth development.
- **Youth outcomes.** Here, youth workers define the goals they have for young people, and that young people have for themselves. They also learn strategies to help young people reach their goals by using a youth development approach.
- **Cultural assumptions.** Youth workers identify the barriers that adults bring to their work with young people and identify alternative caring behaviours.

- **Core competencies of youth work.** Youth workers examine the key attributes, skills and knowledge of an exemplary youth worker.
- **Opportunities and supports.** Youth workers learn how “best practice” requires the engagement of youth in a wide range of opportunities, supports and services.
- **Youth participation.** Youth workers discuss the practices and policies of meaningful youth participation and ways to promote them in programmes.
- **Practice, review and celebration.** Youth workers deepen their learning about youth work through practice and review.

The training was extremely well-received by the youth workers who participated. A majority said it had had a significant impact on their practice. Specific learning reported by participants included:

- being introduced to the concepts of youth development
- shifting thinking from developing programmes *for* young people to programmes *with* young people
- the opportunity and skills to critically reflect on their own practice
- providing a common language to discuss youth work with others
- increased networking opportunities within the sector.

Organisations found that the training had:

- increased their awareness of and commitment to providing training for youth workers
- increased collaboration and networking across organisations
- improved the level of awareness and discussion about youth development within organisations (AED, 2002).

#### 5.1.2 Staff Development For The Youth Development Professional

A 2003 paper, *Staff development for the youth development professional*, argues that developing an understanding of key elements of positive youth development and communicating these within the youth sector is the key to strengthening professional practice and the quality of youth development programmes.

American academic AJ Huebner and her colleagues say that “youth development” is commonly used to describe:

- something young people do – the natural process of learning, growing and changing
- the philosophy of understanding young people, characterised by a strength-based approach
- a way of working with young people that values their participation, contribution and unique personal characteristics.

They add that while there is general acceptance of the concept of positive youth development, there is no clarity about how to implement this kind of strategy in an organisation. There is also an unspoken assumption that anyone can work with young people. However, they say staff development is the logical place to “begin to infuse the work of youth development with focus and change”.

The paper reports on the work of a research team who developed a framework to integrate youth development theory and practice with a critical, experience-based approach to learning.

The team developed guiding assumptions for positive youth development work, and from these produced a set of specific knowledge and skill outcomes.

The assumptions were:

- All children and young people need support and productive experiences to reach their full potential. Vulnerable, isolated and troubled young people may need extra support and attention. Strong youth development programmes meet the needs of both groups.
- Youth development programmes promote the positive, healthy development of young people. Their mission is to provide the challenges, experiences and supports young people need to reach their full potential.
- Youth development programmes are based on the idea that young people learn practical life skills through structured programmes that emphasise fun, action, and group and individual challenges.
- Caring adults play an essential role in the healthy development of young people. These adults can be called leaders, guides, mentors, advocates, helpers, friends and teachers.
- Each young person and family has strengths that can serve as a source of power and support. Youth development workers must learn to reframe what appear to be negative behaviours into positive, protective forces.
- Young people are an essential resource; they must be active in the planning, execution and evaluation of any programme. In this way they learn from adults and adults learn from them.

From these assumptions, the team identified the specific knowledge and skills workers needed.

The required knowledge includes an understanding of:

- healthy growth and development
- the role of the youth development professional in non-formal settings

- developmentally appropriate programme practices
- their own preferred style of working with young people
- how to apply learning models to practical situations
- risks and protective factors
- effective communication skills for young people and adults
- the influence of peer pressure and support
- the value of healthy risk-taking
- negative and self-destructive behaviours
- how to develop working partnerships between young people and adults.

The team identified these key skills required by youth workers:

- an ability to understand past and current benefits of non-formal education programmes
- demonstrated skills in communicating effectively with children, young people and families
- strategies for minimising risky behaviour in young people they work with
- an ability to engage young people in programmes that build strengths and reinforce positive youth development principles
- advocating for young people, and for resources for them, their families and communities.

The authors say that while the programme they developed did not differ significantly from other youth work training programmes, their commitment to experience-based learning contrasted strongly with many of the programmes examined.

Rather than relying heavily on lecture-style knowledge only loosely related to practice, the programme was built around this question:

*Here is a principle supported by research and practice. If you accept this principle as valuable, what does it mean for the way you work?*

An interactive training programme was developed and trialled among 600 youth workers in 10 sites over four years. Evaluation suggested the approach resulted in a measurable increase in the skills of those who participated.

The authors conclude by saying that to develop effective training programmes for youth development workers, the sector must:

- agree on the knowledge, skills and experience required to be an effective youth worker
- bridge the gulf between research and practice, theory and application
- put the learner, not the teacher, at the centre of the process
- invest in youth development by dedicating significant resources and time to staff development
- create opportunities for youth workers to learn alongside others from different settings (Huebner et al, 2003).

## 6.0 conclusion

A purpose of this review has been to identify strategies that support development of the youth work sector in Australia and the United Kingdom – and to a much lesser extent the United States – that could be applied effectively in New Zealand.

This report reviews relevant material identified and retrieved in the time available, and as such will not be comprehensive. However, on the basis of what has been reviewed, strategies for strengthening the youth worker workforce include:

- a national policy framework to guide the direction of youth work and the development of the youth work sector
- the development of a professional youth workers' association
- a strong trade union to advocate for pay and employment conditions for members
- a widely accepted code of ethics to guide practice
- accreditation of training institutions
- a range of high quality, accessible specialised youth work training.

One key common issue identified by this review is that youth work in all three countries needs to better define what it is, and what youth workers do.

Another issue that has become apparent is that there is a creative tension within youth work that will likely never be resolved. While youth workers do respond to young people's needs – and sometimes challenge those needs – they must also care about positive outcomes; and ensure that their work serves society as well as young people.

The challenge for New Zealand is to strengthen the youth work sector by supporting, rather than restricting its diversity. Youth workers need to speak with a clear and united voice if they are to be respected as a professional group – yet that voice needs to also reflect the diversity contained within it.

Given that the New Zealand youth work sector includes many part-time workers, volunteers, and people without qualifications, there is a danger that national strategies, professional associations, stronger trade unions and training courses will not engage or support much of the workforce. It may also make it harder for these people to stay within youth work.

It may be wise for the next steps towards strengthening the youth work sector to focus on the promotion and

discussion of a code of ethics, and the continued provision of a range of high quality, accessible, and specialised youth work training.

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