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SIDE BY SIDE



A case study report of the experiences of young people supported by **West Kent Extra**

Alison Body
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University of
Kent

Centre for
Philanthropy



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to West Kent Extra for the financial resources to carry out this piece of research. Particular thanks must go to Keith Rowell, Heather Brightwell, Will Campbell-Wroe and the staff at West Kent Extra for all their support in facilitating this project. However most importantly our sincere and heartfelt thanks go to all those who agreed to participate in this research and took the time to speak to us, share their experiences and journeys. Without them this project would not have been possible.



Contents

01 About the authors

02 About West Kent Extra

03 Foreword

05 Executive Summary

08 Introduction

Section 1

Background and Context

09 Chapter 1 – Youth Transition and Participation

16 Chapter 2 – The Role of Charities and Volunteering

14 Chapter 3 – The Current Context of Youth Service Provision

Section 2

The Research and Findings

16 Chapter 4 – The Case Studies

18 Chapter 5 – Pathways In

20 Chapter 6 – Key Ingredients

23 Chapter 7 – Lasting Impacts

27 Chapter 8 – Challenges

Section 3

Next Steps

29 Chapter 9 – Implications for the Future

31 Chapter 10 – Conclusion

About the Authors

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Eddy Hogg is a Lecturer in the Centre for Philanthropy at the University of Kent. His research looks at individual engagement in volunteering and charitable giving and how it is shaped by the social context in which people live. His PhD looked at how this social context changes over the course of people's lives and how this impacts on their voluntary engagement. He also teaches a number of modules on the voluntary sector and volunteering, including two where young people engage in their local communities and reflect upon it.



About West Kent Extra (WKE)



West Kent Extra is a community development charity with a broad, but clear, remit to build and support, strong, inclusive and cohesive communities across Kent. While we are the subsidiary of West Kent Housing Association, a social landlord with 6,500 properties across Kent, we understand that to build strong communities we have to not only engage with all sections of the community but work in close partnership with other organisations and our service users. We do this to ensure that our limited resources are focussed on identifying and tackling unmet need, and giving a voice to those with out one be they individuals, communities or organisations.



Foreword by Will Campbell-Wroe

This research report comes at an interesting time for both the voluntary sector and the youth work sector in the UK. Our initial motivation for approaching the University of Kent to undertake this work was a curiosity about the long-term impact of the work we deliver to communities across Kent. This curiosity was piqued both by our organisation reaching its tenth anniversary and the realisation that the groups of young people we supported at our outset who were then aged between 8 and 13 years old, would now be adults, and also by the larger debate in the voluntary sector of effectively measuring social value and social impact.

Like most organisations in our sector we have a strong sense of purpose and operate on the basis of identifying unmet need. We then seek to deliver work that first, tackles the need in the short-term, second, builds capital in the individual to meet their own needs in the medium term, and finally, builds social capital in the wider community to support itself in the long-term. We embrace the notion embedded within this that our aim is to be self defeating. As a broad ranging charity operating across Kent, and part of a housing association group that literally and metaphorically opens doors onto those in need, we seek to work tirelessly until we reach a point at which we are no longer needed; to enable communities across Kent to help themselves and collectively support those who are most vulnerable.

While these principles are clear, the reality of the funding landscape is that we have to demonstrate the unmet need we have identified and propose services that meet the

first two of these aims, to support the individual and help them to help themselves. This is, in itself, admirable and honourable and we are grateful to a range of funders, small and large, local, regional and national that have supported us in this way. This work has been rewarding and valuable in its own right and has made a real impact. We, like other funded agencies, have become adept at setting, measuring and evaluating targets set with, by and for the recipients of our services. These measures are guided by principles of accountability to service users, funders and stakeholders that the service is value for money and makes a difference. But there is a flaw. By necessity these targets are short-term. They are designed to ensure that tranches of funding are released in line with performance, but they are often also reductive and almost uniformly quantitative.

This approach is understandable to a point, all parties want to ensure that funding, is properly accounted for. And yet, if we limit our understanding of the solution to social issues to be monetary based, numbers based and short-term, we miss the fundamental opportunity to help communities, rather than just individuals, to help themselves. In so doing, we seek not to strive towards that self defeating aim to be no longer needed, but get diverted into creating empires, supported by an ever complex scaffolding of metrics, value for money calculations and 'finger in the air' social value calculations that we convince ourselves are statistically robust.

I'm not against these practices, per se, but I do have a keen sense that they are only a part of

the answer. They do not tell us everything and we do need to balance them with a sense that our real aims and ambitions are long-term ones. We need to have the short-term checks and balances that prevent impropriety and the long-term risk appetite and evaluation methods to ensure we build social capital and let it cascade through the generations.

Which brings us neatly back to our young people...

The journey from childhood to adulthood is a long one, and while our project measures told us that we had a real impact on a cohort of young people ten years ago, at the point of delivery and immediately after, we have lost contact with most of those young people in the past ten years. We were intrigued to see how they were as adults, what choices they had made, and what impact (if any) they felt we had on their lives.

This report is a fantastic opportunity to step back into the lives of young people we first encountered over ten years ago. Their stories and feedback are both moving and enlightening. They shows us the value of our work, in their terms, in their words. Many of the things they identify as important were intended but many were also unintended. I am truly grateful to the ten young adults who had the bravery and courage to allow us back into their worlds and let us see it from their point of view.

It has been a humbling and emotional reminder of our motivations and confirmation that long-term objectives can be realised only in the long-term. The fact that so many of these

young people are now active in their communities leaves a significant legacy that will last well beyond the individuals we met ten years ago and re-encounter here. Their communities, now and in the future, need us a little less than they did in the past, and that's as it should be. It is also a reminder that an aim to build better communities needs a long-term commitment to building relationships of trust and respect and not just serving short-term needs.

I am grateful to Alison Body and Eddy Hogg from the University of Kent, who were able to understand our motivations and match it with an academic approach that draws out the stories of these ten young adults and sets them into a wider context of the youth and voluntary sectors.

Finally, it is worth saying that we make no claim to be unique in the way we work or the impact we have. I'm sure that many other organisations in this field, some of whom we work with in Kent, and most of whom we have yet to meet across the UK, work in similar ways and with similar impact. This report is a meant to be a reminder to ourselves and the rest of the sector that our key long-term motivations are valid and can be measured if we open ourselves up to different ways of understanding and measuring impact. Above all I hope it gives us and others: providers, funders, service users and stakeholders; the courage to lobby for the value of long-term impact, to balance it appropriately with short-term measures and remember, above all else, that these things take time.

Executive Summary

Youth work in England is undergoing rapid and significant change. In the backdrop of austerity, welfare reform and commissioning; voluntary sector organisations like West Kent Extra (WKE) are having to realign services and reconsider their youth offer. The more independent from public sector funding these voluntary sector organisations are, the more freedom they have in designing these services. However ultimately the national youth offer and youth work has changed radically. This has been most notable since the election of the Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010, and the following election of the Conservative government in 2015, fuelling a debate about the very function and impact of youth work.

This report makes an important contribution to this debate by presenting what young people themselves consider to be important and highlighting, as a case study example, the long term impacts a voluntary sector organisation can have. Working with WKE, a charity who have been delivering youth services since 2003, we engaged 10 past participants and explored what they felt the charity had done for them and how it had influenced their life journey so far. The findings in this report both show the impact of the work of WKE and highlight learning for all voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people.

Section 1 sets the scene, exploring what we know through established research, and outlines the background and context of youth work and the youth participation agenda, particularly exploring the impact this work has on citizenship, volunteering and outcomes for young people. Section 2 of the report outlines the research and findings, highlighting what young people perceived as the key ingredients which positively impacted their experiences and the lasting impact of the work carried out by WKE youth workers, staff and volunteers. Section 3 seeks to tie this all together and presents the potential implications for the future as WKE and other youth providers move forwards, concluding that building long term and sustained positive relationships with young people, where they feel comfortable, respected and cared about is by far the most important factor to the young people.

Considering young people's involvement with voluntary sector organisations as a journey the research identified a multiplicity of pathways into the WKE service including; engagement by outreach youth workers, going along to events with friends, accompanying older siblings, school referrals, etc.



Executive Summary continued

However once engaged relationships emerge as the single, most dominant factor in terms of sustaining engagement of young people in communities. Other significant factors include having a voice, feeling that they can have influence in decision making processes which affect them, feeling cared about and having the chance to experience new things through trips, activities and access to facilities or equipment otherwise unavailable to them.

The findings show that beneficiaries define their experiences and relationship to a project through their relationship with individual staff and volunteers supporting them, and less so with services, projects or the wider organisation.

Furthermore service provision which focuses on giving young people a voice has clear lasting impacts for creating strong

Summary of young people's journeys with West Kent Extra

Pathways in

- Outreach youth workers
- School
- Friends
- Family etc

Key ingredients

(as perceived by young people)

- Key relationships with individuals, including staff and peers
- Having a voice
- Experiencing new things/opportunities



Lasting impacts

- Confidence
- Self esteem
- Increased levels of volunteering
- Social responsibility
- A sense of 'giving back'

Moving on

- Employment
- Volunteering
- Studying
- Often remaining engaged/in contact with WKE

communities. The findings suggest young people engaged in these programmes are more likely to volunteer, have a strong desire to 'give back', are more likely to engage in community participation and advocacy, and have an increased sense of social responsibility and supporting others.

The report concludes with four key challenges that WKE and other voluntary sector youth organisations need to consider in moving forwards;

- We argue the case for the value and continuation of open access provision built on lasting relationships and its impact in reaching marginalised and disadvantaged young people.
- Voluntary sector organisations, like WKE, have a real strength in their ability to form long term relationships with beneficiaries. Consideration needs to be given as to how they can potentially harness or move forwards those young people who wish to 'give back' and develop sustainable models of volunteering and social responsibility.
- There are many examples of youth participation good practice; however youth focused organisations need to continue to focus on how young people can continue and increasingly set the participation agenda.
- There is an ongoing value for voluntary sector organisations in capturing long term impacts through longitudinal and ongoing monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Introduction

Across the UK, young people are engaged in their communities in a range of ways; helping others and helping themselves transition into adulthood. This engagement is supported by a wide variety of voluntary organisations, small and large, which provide opportunities for young people to identify, engage and express their passions and interests.

Charities providing support for young people are increasingly required to measure outputs, outcomes and impact, and to do so are often required to deliver and reflect on short term interventions. Such methods provide impact data which is obsessed with immediate, calculable outputs and evidence. This report aims to strip away this complexity and short term focus, to deliver an alternative perspective which focuses on the journey of beneficiaries and their ongoing relationships with charities and service providers. Using the charity West Kent Extra (WKE) as a case study example of a voluntary sector organisation delivering youth services, we attempt to explore the importance and significance of this journey, and these relationships, and what lasting impacts they can have on beneficiaries.

WKE has an impressive history, which is beautifully captured in the 'Ten Year Supplement' report produced in 2013. As a subsidiary charity to the larger not-for-profit organisation West Kent Housing Association, they engage closely with the West Kent tenants and the wider community. The Housing Association itself dates back to 1989, with WKE being formed in 2003 to 'expand community development and resident's involvement work'. WKE built further on the community development work which was already established through the Association of West Kent Tenants.

Given this history, West Kent Housing Association and the supporting charity have engaged with tenants and the communities they live in for over 25 years. WKE's founding mission is: To build and support strong, cohesive and inclusive neighbourhoods. This meant the creation of 'sustainable, cohesive communities through strong, long-term relationships built on trust and respect'. This research aims to explore those long term relationships through the subjective accounts of beneficiaries who have journeyed with West Kent.

Section 1

Background and context

Chapter 1 – Youth transition and participation

This chapter presents an overview of the established research which underpins this report, setting the context and analysis framework for beneficiary relationships and pathways with charities and voluntary organisations. It begins by looking at the two concepts which underpin this research; the changing nature of the transition from childhood to adulthood and the different factors which affect this process, and the youth participation agenda.

Youth Transitions

There are few, if any, phases of life as debated as youth and young adulthood. This stage of life, when individuals are aged from around 13 to 25 years old, has been the focus of much academic research and far more public discussion.¹ During this period, young people make the transition to, or towards, adulthood. This has often been thought of as a pathway, down which a person must walk in order to become an adult.² During this phase of life, young people are often apart from their families for the first time (to a greater or lesser extent), leave the protective environment of school and are able to experiment with their identity, with their attitudes and with their freedom.

Academic work on the transitions that young people make has typically viewed them as comprising of two main areas: employment and family life. According to this view, between ages around 15 and 25, young people transition from education to employment with the eventual goal, it is assumed, of securing permanent, full time employment. At the same time, they transition from being a dependent child in the family home to establishing their independence, moving into their own home and potentially starting a family of their own.

Over the last few decades pathways into adulthood have become more complex.³ Increasingly the pathways that young people take in their transition to adulthood are non-uniform and do not follow socially expected norms. Rather, the borders between different periods of life have become fuzzy and blurred. Experiences of young people have changed significantly in recent decades due to changes in the education system, the labour market and in family structures.⁴ As a result, transitions are taking longer to accomplish and are less likely to comprise a straightforward movement from education to work and from dependent

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- 1 Barry, M. (2005) The inclusive illusion of youth transitions. In M. Barry (Ed) Youth Policy and Social Inclusion. London: Routledge, pp 78–91.
 - 2 Heinz, W. (2009) Youth transitions in an age of uncertainty. In A. Furlong (Ed) Handbook of youth and young adulthood: new perspectives and agendas. London: Routledge, pp 3–13.
 - 3 France, A. (2007) Understanding Youth in Late Modernity. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
 - 4 Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (1997) Young People & Social Change: New Perspectives. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Section 1

Background and context

Chapter 1 – Youth transition and participation continued

to independent living. Furthermore, these transitions can be cyclical and reversible – young people may make progress towards independence before some event or change results in them moving back into the family home and/or back to dependency on their parents.

Reforms in the education system currently mean there are a number of ages at which individuals can leave full time education, and once they do there are a number of further education options available. Once a young person leaves education, the job market into which they enter is far removed from that which their parents experienced. Family life too has changed – the nuclear family is less all pervasive that it historically has been and increasingly families are fragmented before as well as during transitions to adulthood. Uncertainty in the job market means that the family, however fragmented, has gained increased importance in supporting young people during their transitions to adulthood, both in terms of amounts and the length of time it is required. Not all parents have the resources to be able to provide this support, and as such it may fall to voluntary organisations to provide it. Further, while a young person's family background continues to have a significant impact on future prospects, families can also mediate this and help their children to succeed against

the odds.⁵ However, when this family commitment does not exist it can be replaced to some extent by voluntary organisations who can help young people to succeed against the odds.

Youth Participation

Youth participation has been a central focus of policy makers, academics and practitioners alike for some years. Heavily drawing upon the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, New Labour's (1997–2010) Every Child Matter's policy firmly placed children and young people as consumers of services and advocated for their right to 'be involved in decision making which affects them'.⁶

This approach was reinforced by the Government's legal responsibilities to fulfil the requirements of the Children Act for England and Wales (1989), the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Human Rights Act (1998). Labour's establishment of the cross-departmental Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) placed children's participation in the very core of the strategy document *Learning to Listen*, stating that 'the Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use'.⁷

5 Jones, G. (2005) Young adults and the extension of economic dependence. London: Family and Parenting Institute.

6 DFES (2003) Every Child Matters, Department of Health: London.

7 CYPU (2001) 'Learning to listen: core principles for the involvement of children and young people', Department for Education and Skills, Annesley.

The creation of the Children's Fund initiative by the CYPU in 2000, of which participation was a core strand demonstrated a strategic and national push for the 'participation agenda' to be placed at the heart of service provision for children and young people.

Building on this momentum, policy makers, researchers and educators highlighted the participation agenda in improving outcomes for children and young people in educational settings;⁸ whilst other research highlights the role of the young people as future voters, with the participation projects and the work of voluntary sector organisations like WKE increasing citizenship and democratic understanding.⁹ However there have been significant tensions identified in the how much children and young people are embraced in working partnership with organisations and decision making processes, versus simply being consulted, with mixed results emerging.¹⁰

Research¹¹ also highlights the importance of role of the youth worker or practitioner in these processes, emphasising the importance of this role in creating the appropriate space, context and environment for meaningful and 'real' participation to take place. Participation

has often been argued as a tool for overcoming inequalities and imbalances between different levels of authority. However, research suggests this is rarely the case and instead the focus should be on what participation can do in terms of adding the voice of young people, building their skills and all of the other additional benefits that young people can experience through these processes, including relationship building, confidence and trust.



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- 8 Rudduck J, Flutter J. (2004) *How to Improve your School*. Continuum: London.
- 9 Kerr D, Cleaver E. (2004) *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study: Literature Review*. Department for Education and Skills: London.
- 10 Spicer, N and Evans, R (2006). Developing Children and Young People's Participation in Strategic Processes: The Experience of the Children's Fund Initiative. *Social Policy and Society*, 5, pp 177–188.
- 11 Nolas, S (2014) Exploring young people's and youth workers' experiences of spaces for 'youth development': creating cultures of participation, *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1.

Section 1

Background and context

Chapter 2 – The role of charities and volunteering

There exists much literature and research concerning the role charities and the voluntary sector, alongside the contribution that volunteering can make to the lives of young people. In this chapter we briefly summarise some of the key arguments.

The Value of Charity Involvement

The benefits that occur as a result of the activities of voluntary organisations are plentiful and varied. They include direct benefits to the immediate recipients of services – in the case of WKE the young people which use their services – but also include wider community benefits which accrue to a wide range of stakeholders – family members, friends, neighbours and the community as a whole.¹² The voluntary sector has distinct advantages over the other sectors because of the flexibility of the organisational structures and ability to react quickly and independently – voluntary organisations answer to neither shareholders or to voters.¹³ As such they are argued to be the most effective suppliers for some situations which are neither about profit nor politics.

Voluntary sector organisations often deal with people who are disadvantaged in one form or another and who are not always able to clearly articulate their needs. They are often

considered to be best placed to supply the goods and services these people need – their provision may not be a vote winner and the users may not be in a position to pay for it, but those who run the voluntary organisation are able to see the need for it. As such, a voluntary sector organisation has a comparative advantage in the provision of this service.

Voluntary sector organisations can add value in other ways, too. Often they are funded by people or groups who have a strong commitment to core values which they seek to show through the work they do. By staying true to their core values, voluntary sector organisations are able to achieve goals that organisations from other sectors would not be able to. Voluntary sector organisations sit in a middle ground between the formally organised and impersonal state and the sometimes chaotic and uneven provision of informal care. They are able to provide a personalized service to the people they support, yet are organised and able to provide this support consistently over long periods of time. Furthermore, simply being part of a voluntary organisation provides a sense of camaraderie and comradeship and a sense of belonging and identity.¹⁴ For young people experiencing difficult transitions this can be of enormous benefit as they

12 Salamon, L. (1992) *Social Services*. In C. Coltfeiler (Ed) *Who Benefits from the Nonprofit Sector?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp 134–173.

13 Billis, D. and Glennerster, H. (1998) *Human services and the voluntary sector: towards a theory of comparative advantage*. *Journal of Social Policy*, 27 (1): 79–98.

14 Rochester, C. (2013) *Rediscovering Voluntary Action: The Beat of a Different Drum*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

find a place which welcomes them and supports them as they continue on the path to adulthood.

Youth Volunteering and Citizenship

Just as with youth transitions, when we consider volunteering it is helpful not to think of it just at a single moment in time but rather as part of an ongoing process which changes over the course of people's lives. It is often haphazard with different activities taken on at different times of life for different reasons. However, we know that positive early experiences of volunteering increase the likelihood of someone volunteering as they go through their lives.¹⁵ Socialisation theory argues that being a volunteer is a role that can be learned. As such, young people are more likely to take up volunteer roles during the transition to adulthood if they have previously experienced volunteering in contexts such as school, church or, in the case of West Kent Extra, at a youth voluntary organisation.¹⁶

Through volunteering and being part of voluntary sector organisations, young people can learn philanthropic behaviours and the positive impact it has on their relationships with other people and their own sense of identity. It also allows young people to see how collective effort can enable them and others

to achieve their goals. Looking across the water at the USA, longitudinal data found that young people's involvement in voluntary organisations that encouraged them to be involved in community activities, public speaking and debate was the strongest predictor of continued political engagement during and after transitions to adulthood.¹⁷ This training in citizenship enables young people to speak out on behalf of their communities and to affect change for themselves and others.

There are however inequalities in the opportunities for voluntary involvement available for young people. Organisations such as WKE help mitigate this by providing opportunities in areas where they might not otherwise exist. The National Citizen Service, launched by the Coalition Government in 2011, also seeks to provide these opportunities through partnership between the state and private and voluntary sector organisations. Such initiatives by voluntary sector and state organisations enable young people to take part in voluntary activities among their friends. Research shows that this is important – young people are more likely to do the volunteering activities that their peers are doing, so there is a strong group influence at play.¹⁸

15 Flanagan, C., (2009) Young people's civic engagement and political development. In A. Furlong (Ed) Handbook of youth and young adulthood: new perspectives and agendas. London: Routledge, pp 291–300.

16 Musick, M. and Wilson, J. (2007) *Volunteers: A Social Profile*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

17 McFarland, D. and Thomas, R. (2006) Bowling young: How youth voluntary associations influence adult political participation. *American Sociological Review* 71 (3): 401–425.

18 Musick, M. and Wilson, J. (2007) *Volunteers: A Social Profile*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Section 1

Background and context

Chapter 3 – The current context of youth service provision

Since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010, followed by the Conservative Government in 2015, youth services and provision have undergone radical transformation. According to the National Youth Agency¹⁹ there is no longer a common form of youth service provision across England. Indeed multiple studies identify a growing differentiation in service provision as a rapid re-shaping of services occurs based on local circumstances, rather than a nationally agreed vision.

Much of this shift has occurred due to continued reductions in council spending, with ongoing reductions announced in 2015. With local authority youth service budgets commonly being reduced by over 50% or more since 2010, the funding cuts are driving forward a radically different model of service provision for young people. Driven by a rise in contracting and commissioning youth services are often shifting up tiers of intervention and being pushed, through contracts, to become increasingly specialised and targeted. In the absence of a national youth policy this has driven youth work to a more reactionary model of interventions. Increasingly commissioned under the prevention discourse the traditional youth work model is being merged in with social care intervention. For example qualified youth workers are progressively more likely to be delivering case load based interventions

or working on targeted intervention programmes such as Troubled Families. This does reflect an ongoing recognition of the traditional skill base of youth workers and their contribution to young people's lives, but is markedly different from delivery of universal services, with specialist support woven through.

Historically voluntary organisations have enjoyed a long and established partnership with the State in delivery of youth services. Over the term of New Labour the politically and socially acknowledged shift of services from public sector organisations to voluntary sector organisations saw a huge rise in the number of charities and voluntary sector groups delivering youth services largely through grants based service contracts. With the election of Conservative led Coalition government in 2010 and the ever increasing rise of a commissioning culture, this became an even clearer reality with a push from the devolution of social responsibility and political power to local communities. Though the success of this is debatable, this has led to an ongoing redefinition of the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state. Voluntary sector organisations working within youth services are increasingly being awarded contracts that are dictated by the State, and may fundamentally alter the way they behave, develop and grow.

¹⁹ The National Youth Agency offer a useful overview of in their 'Youth Services in England: Changes and Trends in the Provision of Services (2014)' at <http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Youth-services-in-England-changes-and-trends.pdf>.



The commissioning models employed by councils across all service areas, including youth services, is hugely varied and widely thought to be driving up competition within the voluntary sector, whilst negatively affecting partnership working and collaboration between voluntary sector partners. How the voluntary sector responds to these changes and challenges remains down to local leadership and infrastructure and thus varies widely across the UK. There are opportunities for innovative partnership working and engagement alongside the increased outsourcing of youth services.

However the multiple issues presented by the ever changing environment presents a number of challenges for voluntary sector organisations working with young people, including the risk of mission drift when organisations are led by financial resources rather than need, and therefore compromise their mission and objectives.²⁰ Undoubtedly the changes to youth service provision are still ongoing, and with further public sector cuts announced in 2015 by the Conservative government voluntary sector organisations must consider how they position themselves to face future challenges.

²⁰ Benson, A. 2014. Working Paper 6 "The Devil that has come amongst us": the impact of commissioning and procurement practices', NCIA.

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 4 – The case studies

This section outlines the methodology and findings of the research which underpins this report.

To date there exists much research on the impact of charitable work with young people, however there is little research which seeks to explore the life journeys of beneficiaries; how, when and why they receive support; the impact support has on the trajectory of their lives and the relationships built which may mean they are motivated to 'give back'. The main focus of this research therefore was to address this gap in understanding and knowledge through the use of in-depth case study analysis involving 10 individuals who had been, or were still, involved in WKE youth focused projects.

This approach was chosen as the research aimed to investigate individual's perspectives to develop an in depth understanding of the personal context within which young people engage with service provision. This allowed for a very detailed subject coverage which provided insights unobtainable from more generalised, larger samples;²¹ whilst also allowing us to access complex knowledge directly from the individuals with the relevant experiences.²²

Methodology for Identifying and engaging Case Studies

WKE contacted past beneficiaries who had been involved in youth participation focused projects and sought consent for their contact details and names to be passed over to researchers at the University of Kent. Once consent had been sought to share details, researchers from the University of Kent contacted all beneficiaries. In total 10 individual participants, aged 18 to 24 years were interviewed.

Interviews were semi structured, each following a similar line of questioning while allowing for individual perspectives and events to be discussed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, was recorded and transcribed. Interviews remain completely confidential and participants were encouraged to share their views honestly and freely. Once transcribed the interviews were analysed to discover and unpick themes, patterns and tensions in the data.

21 Ritchie, J. (2003) 'The applications of Qualitative Research Method's in Ritchie, J.& Lewis, J. (eds) (2003) 'Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers', London, Sage

22 Hesse-Biber, S., and Leavy, P. (2006) The Practice of Qualitative Research, London, Sage

Key Facts about the Young People who participated

5 female, 5 male participants



All participants aged 18–24 years old



8 of the interviewed participants are currently or have been tenants of West Kent Housing Association and their parents and/or family remain tenants with West Kent Housing Association



4 of the participants are still involved with West Kent Extra through either volunteering or have moved onto to employment by the charity



4 have been employed by the charity at some point over the last 4 years



6 of the participants have worked in social welfare sector in last year



9 of the participants have volunteered within the last year



9 of the 10 participants are currently employed, studying or in training



Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 5 – Pathways in

The research highlighted the multiple different ways in which people engage with charities. However what remained consistent was the importance of these ‘pathways in’, in shaping young people’s understanding and ongoing engagement with the project or service.

What was clear is there is no ‘one size fits all’ method to attracting and positively engaging young people. This is not new knowledge, indeed participants in this study first heard about the charity and the projects on offer through a variety of different routes.



A strength of the youth service provision offered by WKE is the flexibility around engagement of young people. Some of the young people immediately wanted to be involved in structured projects and programmes of activity, these were more often than not those who had pro-actively sought the charity out stimulated by word of mouth or marketing. Others, more predominantly those generally classified as 'hard to reach', took much longer – weeks and sometimes months – to form a relationship with youth workers. Each of the projects discussed in the research operated an open access policy meaning all young people were made welcome. This meant young people did not feel targeted and 'hard to reach' groups were engaged through additional space created by youth workers, such as a youth bus, offering hot drinks and activities.

This presents an interesting challenge for youth services generally. Constraints in funding and contracts to deliver certain services can mean there is not always adequate 'space' for this interaction to build up. Meanwhile the difference between engagement and disengagement emerges within this research as a very fine line. Many of the young people identified early stages and points at which they could have easily walked away from the project and disengaged, however equally they each identified reasons as to why they did not and why they remained engaged in these early stages.

These reasons included feeling respected, cared about and able to trust the youth workers. Even though many of young people were reflecting on early engagement which had occurred many years previously, they each listed distinctive qualities about that early engagement and what made it special enough for them to feel they should go back. These included the provision of leisure and sport activities, providing somewhere warm to go, providing a cup of tea or something to eat and someone asking them how they were.

“It started from there really, they turned up in a youth van and at first I was bit 'yeah right,' we'd had load of stuff like that before and they all disappeared again. But these guys kept coming back and actually they seemed alright really and when it was getting colder and dark, we'd look around all the stuff in the van and they'd give us tea or hot chocolate, we got chatting and it went from there really.”

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 6 – Key ingredients

This chapter explores the key ingredients which we suggest, based on this research, underpin successful lasting engagement of young people.

Building Lasting Relationships

As the previous chapters demonstrate, building positive relationships with young people is a key ingredient for success in terms of having a meaningful lasting impact. The young people we spoke to in this research consistently identified the importance of ongoing support and relationships as a key ingredient for success. However it is important to note that none of them particularly discussed their relationship with the wider charity, but instead focused on a few key individuals. These relationships appear to act as the hub of the wheel that meant young people felt they could talk about a wide range of issues from drugs, sex, mental health issues, problems at home to ambitions, aspirations and dreams.

“ And you know you can trust these guys with anything. They will forward me on to the right people, they know what to do, and they are here for us and support us. Anything really, sexual health wise etc, people are just here. Even with just keeping up with info about the housing or stuff in community – they are always where I’ll come first.”

What was of particular importance was how these relationships became part of the ongoing support networks for the young people we spoke to. Though many initially got involved in the charity whilst in relatively stable periods of their lives, when that stability shifted and a crisis emerged, they immediately had an external network to their family which supported them. Three of the young people particularly drew on this as being significantly important to them, for example one, still engaged with the charity reflected:

“ I feel valued here, I wasn’t treated like that at school not at all. They didn’t care what was happening but guys here did. I just needed someone to say ‘what do you need’. I needed support not someone telling me everything I was doing was wrong. These guys just said ‘how can we help you’, they actually listened and cared. School, I was just a bit of a nuisance. I didn’t want to talk to them and ended up not going, then not talking to them and I ended up leaving. This place is my first port of call. If I need something, I will always come here first.”

The importance of relationships did not just exist between the staff and volunteers and young people, but manifested itself throughout the projects, with significant importance also being applied to facilitating positive relationships between young people and their peers.

“ I met these really random people, people I would never have hung out with before, they were so different to me, and at first I was like, OK not sure how this will work. But then I got to know them, they became my friends and they are still my friends.”

Having a Voice

Alongside building lasting relationships, having a voice emerged as one of the most important key ingredients within the research. Each of the young people we spoke to highlighted how they felt ‘being heard’ and ‘listened too’ directly improved their life through increased confidence and self-esteem. They also highlighted how through this work, they felt more confident to articulate their views, discuss things with those in authority and stand up for their rights.

“ I kept going to the meetings and saying come on guys what are the issues and problems in this area, and everyone kept saying to me well we’ve got nothing to do around here, nowhere to go, it’s so boring and we just hang around street corners... so we got together and said right let’s do something about this and we did... we got all the funding and started the youth café first.”

This strand of work emerged as one of the most dominant amongst the young people interviewed in terms of lasting impact and influencing their long term behaviours. We discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

Interviewees also expressed strong sense of achievement in accomplishments achieved. Many of the young people we spoke to have been nominated for awards for their work and volunteering, and majority of them felt respected and their contribution acknowledged by family, friends and their local community.

“ I got nominated for this award and I was like really, really chuffed... and then I got it, I actually won, I couldn’t believe it.”

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 6 – Key ingredients continued

New Experiences

The final key ingredient we highlight in this research as fundamental for having a meaningful lasting impact on young people is the opportunity to experience new things. This ranged hugely within the research accessing equipment and facilities to produce music, film and art; to trips to Wales, camping and even a trip to Africa. For the young people we spoke to the impact of these new experiences ranged from being something they felt proud of doing and enjoyed, to being key and life changing experiences.



“Africa was a massive turning point for me, it made me realise quite a few things, though it is difficult to describe. I realised if you want things in life you have to work hard for them. I came back and went out and made sure I’d get a job straight away. I got my first job by banging on the door every single day until they would speak to me. They basically got so fed up they gave me an interview for Christmas work, then I stayed there for a long time. Before that I wasn’t motivated to get work, well I hadn’t been through the education had I! In Africa we saw extreme poverty and thought to myself, OK I might not have been to school but these guys don’t even have food or a way to get to school, they don’t have these opportunities. When you look at that your life isn’t that bad and you need to make the most of it.”

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 7 – Lasting impacts

Drawing on the experiences of the young people we spoke to and background research discussed in chapters 1 to 3, in this chapter we suggest a number of significant lasting impacts which emerged as consistent.

Lasting Impact for Individuals

The young people we spoke to consistently identify their time with WKE as **life changing and extremely significant to them.**

“West Kent Extra changed my life... if it wasn't for them then I wouldn't be half the person that I am now... it started by journey and I'm still on this journey... I had no support, I had so many issues... these guys saved me.”

As well as being a key ingredient in ensuring impact, the young people consistently felt that their ability to form and maintain relationships was improved through the engagement with the charity. This appeared on a variety of different levels, from improvements in peer to peer relationships, relationships with those in authority, and relationships with individuals and groups younger than themselves.

Through these improved relationships with individuals younger than themselves, those young people we spoke to also consistently demonstrated a strong inclination to helping others – supporting peers and other young people to ‘grow and develop’, and demonstrated a strong desire to ‘give back’.

“If we hadn't had been involved in that (development of new youth facilities) I don't think I would have really thought too much about the next generation. For the first time it was like, it wasn't just me and my age group that mattered but what we left behind, what would our lasting impact on them be like. And you just got to look around the area to see that playing out. There is stuff here that the kids use that wouldn't have been if we hadn't of done what we did.”

Drawing on the concept of self-efficacy as a way of understanding and interpreting confidence this research supports wider studies²³ which suggest youth participation work voice supports in increasing this confidence. Self-efficacy refers to what an individual's belief about what they feel they can and cannot do in terms of particular tasks or within different situations. Through self-reflection, the young people we spoke to highlighted particular experiences and events which demonstrated this increase in

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 7 – Lasting impacts continued

self-efficacy according to predefined indicators concerning thinking, feeling and acting.²⁴ As such each reflected they felt more confident to act positively in given situations, and thought more about engaging in challenging tasks. Such examples varied from applying for new jobs, having a voice in local decision making and campaigning for theirs and others rights.

A final note on impact for individuals draws upon how valued and individually supported by WKE each young person felt. There was a consistency amongst the young people we spoke to in feeling uniquely supported and that the individuals who worked with them '*saw something special*'. Most of the case studies felt they had been personally invested in.

"I feel they really invested in me...they put so much into me, I mean, I felt people really cared about me..."

Volunteering

All but one of the young people we spoke to were regularly undertaking formal and/or informal volunteering opportunities, this ranged from supporting youth programmes, sports coaching to self-funding trips to Africa to support community development programmes. According to the Cabinet Office

(2015) young people aged 16 to 25 are the most likely to volunteer of any age range, with over a third (35%) volunteering at least once a month. Within our cohort of young people, 9 of the 10 volunteered within last year, 8 out of the 10 had volunteered within the last six months, and 5 out of the 10 volunteered on a regular basis.

All but one of those volunteering had progressed into this through networks established through WKE. This resulted in them either continuing as part of the WKE by volunteering with them, and even in several cases moving onto into employment within this charity or continuing their volunteering through networks and opportunities they had established in the original charity.

"In this charity, you grow up through it, and when you get to a certain age you volunteer, give back, and then you may move on to be a youth worker or something... you always stick around, somehow you always remember and connect back to here. You will always be a part of it."

We know from other research²⁵ that young people are more likely to get involved in volunteering through school, youth clubs and

24 Schwarzer, R. & Fuchs, R., (1995) Self-efficacy and Health Behaviours. In Conner, M. & Norman, P. (Eds). Predicting Health Behaviour. Open University Press, 1995.

25 Cabinet Office for the Third Sector (2009) A British Youth Council Report: 'Recognise and Respect Us' Overcoming Barriers to Youth Volunteering, Cabinet Office for the Third Sector.

informal networks such as friends and families. Considering this, there is an opportunity to encourage and support this momentum both in terms of growing the initial charity and supporting the wider voluntary sector. Furthermore we know that early experiences of volunteering increases the likelihood of someone volunteering as they go through their lives.²⁶

It was significant that majority of the young people we spoke to reflected in depth about a recognition and desire to 'give back' to their communities. This manifested itself through a desire to have a voice in local decision making, challenge what they saw as injustices in their local community and volunteering in various different ways for local charities and sport clubs. This resulted in a strong and consistent recognition of social responsibility.

Citizenship

We know from previous studies both in the UK and USA that young people's involvement in voluntary sector organisations, where they have opportunities to participate in decision making and volunteer, encourages them to be involved in community activities, public speaking and debate.

The young people whose stories we have explored within this report supported this notion with majority of the young people

continuing into adulthood to advocate strongly for their and others right and beliefs, or expressing a willingness to do.

“Now I go to the town council and when they say anything else to add, I'm like right, yes, I've got something to say, this is what our community needs...”

There are a number of potential reasons which support this finding. The projects offered by WKE enabled young people to speak out on behalf of their communities and to affect change for themselves and others. This lived experience of collective effort to achieve goals is likely to encourage and teach young people political engagement skills such as participating in community activities, public speaking and debate. We know that participation in these activities acts as the strongest predictor of continued political engagement during and after transitions to adulthood.²⁷

Such socialisation means that young people are effectively trained in citizenship from an early age and therefore enabled to speak out on behalf of themselves and their communities to affect change later on in life.

26 Flanagan, C., (2009) Young people's civic engagement and political development. In A. Furlong (Ed) Handbook of youth and young adulthood: new perspectives and agendas. London: Routledge, pp 291–300.

27 McFarland, D, and Thomas, R. (2006) Bowling young: How youth voluntary associations influence adult political participation. American Sociological Review 71 (3): 401–425.

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 7 – Lasting impacts continued

Organisational

There are long term organisational impact and benefits to this approach to working. It was evident from speaking to the young people that WKE had been hugely influential in their lives and also the lives of those around them. The building of ongoing, sustained relationships within communities ensured a high reputational value amongst their beneficiaries and their families. Many of the young people we spoke to highlighted how they now encouraged younger siblings, family friends and children and other young people in the local community to join the projects.

Based on their experiences with WKE, former beneficiaries demonstrated a strong desire to ‘give back’ – revealing continued support for the sustainability and development the charity. This manifested itself in a variety of ways from them wishing to raise money and support for the charity, volunteering and even eventually ending up working for WKE.

“If it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t have gotten into a job there that I love, be doing things I love and it all started back then, when we met the youth workers on a bench in a park – that moment for me changed everything...”

Within the research there was also evidence of good collaboration of youth services. Young people detailed how they had seamlessly moved between projects led by different agencies through the support of WKE, often not even aware of the change in lead service provider, but retaining contact with WKE throughout.

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 8 – Challenges

Chapter 6 and 7 outline the findings and wide range of strengths that were identified through this research. In this chapter we seek to explore some of the challenges that emerged, both those that potentially face WKE and all charities working with young people.

Moving on

The majority of the young people we spoke to reflected on an ongoing desire to 'give back' and continue to support the development and sustainability of WKE. However there appears to be a gap in both advice on youth provision and academic research which examines this element of 'supporting to remain and/or exiting' youth projects and services.

“ I felt really bereft when I was too old for the youth forum, it was like I had to move out of home... it was like losing my family.”

It is important to actively manage these remain and exit strategies. The strength of relational approach of WKE, meant that the beneficiaries felt very connected and still part of the charity even once they had outgrown its projects. The majority of young people involved in the research also expressed an ongoing desire to meet as group and continue engagement beyond the lifetime of particular projects and/or their age of engagement. Indeed four of the ten young people we spoke to continue their involvement with WKE, and research suggests this is not

uncommon for other voluntary sector organisations. However given this we suggest it is important that charities develop pro-active 'moving on' strategies which allow for pathways that capture the momentum and desire to 'give back', as well as positively support young people to move onto other opportunities.

Youth-led agenda

Each young person we spoke to gave examples of excellent and innovative participation opportunities. However there was some tension between what was perceived as adult-led participation, that is tasks and agenda items set by adults, and youth-led participation, where the participants felt ownership of the agenda. Reflecting back on activities majority of the young people we spoke to highlighted experiences of both. On discussion this divide between youth-led and adult-led participation became more prominent when the participation projects were in partnership with a range of public sector agencies; the more partners involved, the more tokenistic young people felt their input became. Those who reflected on these different participative mechanisms highlighted the youth-led model as more empowering, respectful and having a greater lasting impact on their skills and confidence.

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 8 – Challenges continued

“ We had involvement in how a centre was built, we went along to all the meetings but I didn't feel we, as young people, really got a say. I still think young people's involvement is tokenistic and not really valued for our actual opinions... In decision making youth could still be considered a lot more... we still don't get the same say as other groups in society.”

The professionalisation of relationships

A number of the young people identified the professionalisation of the relationship between youth worker and young person in terms of a formalisation of relationships. This formalisation of youth work is not a new debate, however this does potentially create a tension with the concept of building long term relationships which the participants identified in terms of more informal and equal.

There is a difficult balance to strike here and on the whole WKE appeared to have this balance right, however with the ongoing shifts in youth work provision this balance may be harder to maintain.

Limitations of the Research

This report provides an in-depth, qualitative analysis of the long term impacts and pathways based on the experiences of the identified cohort. It reveals some significant and rich findings for voluntary sector organisations to learn from, build on and contribute to. However the size and scale of the study is limited in the overall generalisability. As such we would suggest further research which seeks to capture these impacts as they happen over a longer period of time and investment in longitudinal impact evaluation models. Furthermore this research is based on the experiences of young people who journeyed with WKE and does not address the perspectives of those who choose not to engage or who disengaged early on from service provision. We would suggest it would be useful to seek to capture some of these perspectives in moving forwards.

Section 3

Next steps

Chapter 9 – Implications for the future

This chapter ties together Section 1: Background and Context, and Section 2: The Research and Findings, to suggest potential implications for the future. When operating in an increasingly competitive environment and balancing a range of funding and commissioning requirements, it is important voluntary sector organisations do not lose sight of the long term relationships with young people in favour of funding driven short term interventions. This ever changing environment has given rise to a number of issues that organisations need to contend with; in particular we suggest four issues:

Making a case for retaining open access provision and focus on relationships:

As identified in chapter 3, though funds are diminishing, the public sector is increasingly commissioning youth services out to the voluntary sector and other providers. This presents interesting opportunities for organisations to grow and expand, however does pose the risk of fundamentally altering service provision and shifting away from open access provision, towards case load, specialist interventions. There is of course an argument to be made about the role of youth work within this more specialised area of activity. However this research strongly argues the case for the value and continuation of open access provision and its impact in reaching marginalised and disadvantaged young people.

The young people we spoke to for this research included both marginalised groups and those who were not typically considered as marginalised at point of engagement. However all ten of the young people we spoke too reached varying degrees of crisis or struggle at points in their life and relied heavily on their relationship with WKE to see them through these points. It is impossible of course to predict how these young people would have coped without this additional support, but their perception of the importance WKE played in supporting them return to a positive trajectory highlights the value of the open accessed service provision in engaging both marginalised groups and those at risk of becoming marginalised.

Moving on:

A second challenge this research raises is how relational based youth work providers support and facilitate exit strategies for beneficiaries as both an organisation and at individual youth worker level. This presents a dual challenge; firstly how such organisations can present clear pathways to support beneficiaries who wish to remain engaged with the charity or community and 'give back' beyond the service provision; secondly, how individuals can be supported to exit both the service provision of the organisation and move on from maintained and established relationship built with individuals within the organisation.

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 9 – Implications for the future continued

Continued development of the participation agenda:

A third and perhaps more complex challenging is how to continue to develop the participation agenda. The Youth Voice initiative has been largely protected within the public sector cuts,²⁸ however this is often formalised through very adult led initiatives and projects which young people contribute towards. The research shows that charities such as WKE continue to develop and lead on the participation agenda, this momentum needs to continue, learning through on-going self-reflection and good practice from others.

Within this research each of the young people we spoke to drew upon excellent examples of youth participation, however there is still a tension between young people working on issues identified by adults, and young people working on issues they identify themselves. Participation gives young people the means to address and challenge issues they may face, and thus, if it is to continue to make a positive contribution young people need to be facilitated by policy makers, organisations and practitioners alike to set their own agendas.

Evidencing long term and sustained impact:

The final challenge raised comes down to evidencing this sustained and long term impact. There is commonly held assumption that 'no evidence', means no impact. We know this in itself is not true, however no evidence does make it harder to defend the work of voluntary sector organisations working with young people. There is an ongoing and well established growing sense of need for evaluating the impact of services, but still there appears to be very little long term evaluation. The very premise of open access, and relational based services rests on evidencing this long term impact and therefore we strongly recommend that voluntary sector organisations working with young people seek to try and capture some of these longer term impacts of their work. This also goes hand-in-hand with evidencing the advantages of collaborative working with other organisations. Many voluntary sector organisations frequently and meaningfully collaborate with others, but few collaborate in terms of evidencing impact in a holistic manner, for example in terms of impact on families and communities.

28 National Youth Agency (2014) Youth Services in England: Changes and Trends in the Provision of Services, at <http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Youth-services-in-England-changes-and-trends.pdf>.

Section 3

Next steps

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

This study is based upon in-depth analysis of ten current and former participants of WKE youth projects and provides valuable information for WKE in their development of services. Furthermore the learning can be applied across the field of youth services and youth engagement projects.

Youth engagement projects can play a significant, lasting and important role in the life journeys of their beneficiaries, and in many cases fundamentally alter young people's trajectories and provide necessary support in times of crisis. It is impossible of course to predict what the life outcomes to date would have been for the ten young people we spoke to if they had not been involved in WKE. However what is important is the significance and importance each young person applied to their involvement in the projects and services offered by WKE, and most importantly the significance of the impact they felt the relationships they formed there has had of them to date.

This research highlights the idea that relationships remain central to service provision. Young people rarely identify with different services, projects or the larger organisation; rather they identify with individual practitioners within the organisation and can form strong and lasting attachments to these individuals. The relationships formed mean that if or when young people experience crisis, which is often triggered by unpredictable events, they are networked into immediate support which enables them to move forwards. A relational approach which builds on trust, honesty and respect appears to be very central to the success of youth work and participation projects.

However, it is also important to note that this is not the only the factor which has supported the successful outcomes of the young people involved. The opportunity to go on trips and new experiences, especially when these are far out of the young people's comfort zone, have significant, long term impacts. These new experiences can include encouraging young people to take up learn new skills or access facilities and equipment to improve their skills interests.

Section 2

The research and findings

Chapter 10 – Conclusion continued

Finally the importance and lasting impact of facilitating young people to have a voice also comes out of the research as a dominating theme. Facilitating young people to have a voice through well designed and supportive programmes of participation can have a strong and lasting impact on social responsibility, advocacy and citizenship. Jennie Fleming (2013) summarised this well when concluding her research ‘Young People’s Participation – where next?’:

“People with ‘burning hearts’ need to create new alliances with young people and spaces for them to take a more active role in decisions on issues that they consider important. Such participation is not an end in itself, but lies at the heart of moving forward for young people to improve their lives and make a difference in ways that are important to them.”²⁹



29 Fleming, J. (2013) Young People’s Participation—Where Next? CHILDREN & SOCIETY VOLUME27, pp. 484–495.



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