Youth Work: **Voices of Practice**

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with Kylie Noonan

Durham University and Weston Spirit

Published by

The National Youth Agency

Eastgate House, 19-23 Humberstone Road, Leicester LE5 3GJ.
Tel: 0116 242 7350. Fax: 0116 242 7444.
E-mail: nya@nya.org.uk Websites: www.nya.org.uk www.youthinformation.com

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© The National Youth Agency, March 2006
ISBN: 978 0 86155 338 9
Price: £8.50

Design and Layout: Jim Preston, The National Youth Agency
Printed in the UK by Spectrum Printing Services Limited, Leicester.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our organisations and colleagues at Weston Spirit and Durham University, for allowing us the time and space to carry out this research which was made possible through finance from the Research Grants Programme of the Big Lottery Fund.

We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the members of the Advisory Group particularly for their support and encouragement in the early stages of the project when we were shaping the parameters of the research. They are:
John Holmes, Paul Oginsky, Laura Miles and Will Norman.

Thanks to all those who offered thoughts and shared ideas via our Correspondence Network. They are Janet Batsleer, Tony Gallagher, Ken Harland, Elayne Henderson, Sue Robertson, Rachel Thomson and Tom Wylie. The late Jeremy Brent was also a member of this group at the early stage of the research.

Carole Pugh made an enormous contribution to the collection and analysis of data during the first year of the project.

Finally, and most importantly, we want to acknowledge the valuable contribution of those youth projects across the UK that participated in the research. Youth workers, youth work managers and young people welcomed our researchers, gave time and shared their views openly, allowing us to participate in their everyday lives, and enabling us to appreciate the rich and complex story of youth work.

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Chapter 1:

The Research: Background, Context and Themes

Most youth workers would claim that the most important aspect of their work is - the process *of informal engagement with individual young people and groups which for responsive young people, involves them in a* journey *of personal and social understanding travelled in their own terms, on their own route and in their own time.*
(Research Proposal)

1.1 The principles of youth work

The core purpose of youth work has been defined as the personal and social development of young people through informal education (Merton et al, 2004). Young people are at the centre of youth work practice which is fundamentally concerned with their education and welfare. There are different forms of youth work including for example, centre based provision, detached work on the streets, outreach work, activities-based and faith-based approaches. The profession is value-driven (Harland et al, 2004) and there are a number of principles with an historical pedigree underlying all youth work practice which distinguish it from other related practices such as social work and teaching (Smith, 2003; Davies, 2005a).

Practitioners and theorists generally agree that the voluntary participation of young people, in their free time, is the principal which most clearly distinguishes youth work from other interventions (Jeffs, 2001, Smith, 2003; Davies, 2005a). The development of negotiated relationships between young people and youth workers, based on mutual respect is a defining feature. In the process of relationship building, the emphasis is upon the active participation of young people. The voluntary principle implies that young people are free to enter and leave youth work facilities and relationships and that they are therefore able to exercise a degree of power in the youth work context (Spence, 2004; Davies, 2005a).

Youth workers have always spent time supporting individual young people in response to personal or age-related concerns and issues. However, such interventions are perceived as a consequence rather than a motor of the practice process. The informal educational approach of youth work stresses the importance of young people learning collectively with their peers (Ministry of Education, 1960; Doyle and Smith, 1999; Brent, 2004). Therefore group association

focusing upon enjoyment, challenge and learning is prioritised. This approach begins with a sympathetic understanding of the community and cultural location of the young people involved whilst offering opportunities to widen and deepen experience, to pursue interests and to develop critical understanding of the self in relation to others.

Youth work is thus underpinned by a commitment to working with an open, potentiality model of young people, beginning with their present experiences, responding to their present needs and enthusiasms, and building upon this to situate their learning within a wider social context. This contrasts with problem-based interventions with individuals which derive from a deficit model of young people and which respond to youth as a 'risky' time of 'becoming' rather than as a time of 'being' (Davies, 2005a). However, it is the deficit model which has been dominant within the social policy developments which have shaped the practice environment of youth work in recent years. This is manifest in a shift away from open, voluntary, associated and group-based learning towards targeted, individually-based support designed to smooth the 'transitions' of vulnerable, 'excluded' or 'at risk' young people towards successful adult citizenship (Mizen, 2003; Jeffs and Smith, 2002, 2006; Spence, 2007) Ironically, given the focus upon the individual, one of its consequences is a de-centring of the young person in professional practice in favour of a range of specific outcomes for individuals. This implies a fundamental destabilisation of the professional heart of youth work.

The research project which is reported in the following pages was undertaken during a period in which policy decisions made on the basis of assumptions which are in tension with key principles of youth work, were beginning to impact upon the practice environment, forcing workers to adjust priorities and to raise questions about the extent to which their practice was understood or socially valued.

1.2 Background

'An Everyday Journey: Discovering the Meaning and Value in Youth Work' emerged from a series of conversations between representatives of Weston Spirit and Durham University Community and Youth Work Studies Unit. Initially, the dialogue was motivated by the possibility of evaluating the youth work methods of Weston Spirit. As the discussion developed to cover the policy context in which youth workers were practising, it became apparent that there were other, broader and more urgent issues to research which related to the very nature of youth work itself in contemporary conditions.

From the different organisational perspectives of youth work practice, theory and education within Weston Spirit and Durham University, there was a mutual awareness of disquiet amongst youth workers about the changing nature of the conditions of face-to-face practice. Anecdotal and research evidence (e.g. Crimmens et al, 2004) suggested that those aspects of youth work which workers most valued, and which differentiated it from other professional approaches to work with young people were being eroded by policy and funding decisions made by outsiders. Youth workers habitually claim that their methods facilitate meaningful contact with young people otherwise defined as excluded. Ironically, policy aimed at encouraging social inclusion

(SEU, 1999a; 1999b; 2000) appears to be undermining a central principle of generic youth work practice through its emphasis upon *targeting* those defined as excluded.

The universal and voluntary access which has traditionally marked the youth work environment is clearly contradicted by targeting but in a climate of streamlining where organisational 'efficiency' is the main criterion of success in the public sector, youth workers risk accusations of naiveté and idealism when they attempt to assert the importance of universalism in their approach. With a core principle of professional practice excluded from the policy agenda, debate about the meaning of universalism in the youth work context is silenced and without this, youth workers struggle to define what is unique about their approach. Expressions of disquiet are diverted away from the terrain of principles and onto the frustrations of everyday practice. So workers will often be heard worrying about the problems of short term funding or about the time spent on paper work (Crimmens et al, 2004; Spence, 2004). Disquiet is voiced as 'complaint' and as such their concerns can be dismissed simply as negativity about change itself, or as an unrealistic demand that their work should remain unaccountable, claiming some privileged status for youth work not accorded to other welfare or educational professionals.

Preliminary conversations with practitioners supported the proposition that youth workers were not averse in principle to change or to organisational accountability. Rather it was the terms of reference which informed the processes of change and the systems of accountability which were problematic. There seemed to be a lack of correspondence between the knowledge and understanding relevant to the informal realities of face-to-face youth work practice and the terms in which youth work is being formally discussed and reshaped in the outside world of policy making, partnership work and funding allocation. Organisational requirements loom over face-to-face practice unsympathetically, distorting or marginalising what youth workers believe are the central and most valuable features of their approach. The key problem which emerged for the research was therefore how to understand the relationship between youth worker knowledge, principles and understanding and the realities of practice which necessarily encompasses the perspectives of young people as well as workers.

If the central principles which inform youth work practice are silenced by the policy discourse, then youth work can be nothing more than a method, a set of instrumental interventions, or a specialism within other professions such as health and education. In these circumstances it will be difficult, if not impossible to sustain the professional distinctiveness of youth work, which necessarily includes principles and values. Youth work will not thrive and indeed, might not survive under these circumstances. It will simply become 'work with young people' (Davies, 2005b). Yet it is because youth work does seem to be able to connect positively with some young people who refuse or are invisible to other services, or whose behaviour excludes them from full participation, that its methods are valuable. Delineating the source and nature of such positive connections and their relationship with the principles and values of the profession is therefore an important exercise. If those aspects of youth work which make it attractive to particular groups of young people are undermined, this is not only a problem for the youth work profession. Young people who might otherwise experience benefits, and policy-makers who have interests in addressing social exclusion and raising levels of civic participation within the youth population, also stand to lose out.

1.3 Policy context

The submission for research funding was prepared in the wake of the Government's *Transforming Youth Work* initiative (DfEE 2001; DfES, 2002) relevant to English and Welsh youth services. After years of resource cuts and professional marginalisation, *Transforming Youth Work* promised more resources and recognition to youth work in return for a greater alignment of objectives with the terms of reference of the recently introduced Connexions Service for England (DfEE, 2000). Included in this agenda was a demand for accountability measured with reference to recorded and accredited outcomes of work.

In January 2003, Stovin Hayter, editor of *Young People Now* asked the question, 'Can youth work be fully accountable?' (15-21 Jan. 2003:13). Whilst being careful not to question the importance and significance of Transforming Youth Work, he went on to say:

> *There is a discomfort with what many feel is a commodification and a bureaucratisation of youth work. There is a feeling that real youth work – informal education through association in groups – has been squeezed out by the State's desire to 'fix' individuals.*
>
> *... the more we become obsessed with targeting and measurable outputs, the greater the tendency to push resources only towards the things that can be* measured.

Hayter captures something here of the dilemma which is particularly acute in statutory youth work but also has implications for the voluntary sector if it is to win support from the State. Like all publicly funded services, youth work is required to contribute to the success of policy initiatives. It must therefore respond to the questions and issues which such initiatives are designed to address: it has a responsibility towards externally defined objectives. At the same time, if it is to succeed in meeting these objectives, it needs to maintain that which makes it potentially useful in the first place. There is no necessary reason why the two requirements should be in conflict or tension, but by the same token there is no necessary reason why they should correspond. Hayter's comment suggests a disjuncture between 'real youth work' and the objectives of the state regarding young people.

The generic practice of youth work inherited a dual tradition of concern for young people in relation to structural inequality on the one hand and a desire to facilitate positive experiences with reference to universal characteristics of 'youth' on the other hand. The contemporary objectives of government with regard to England and Wales have been shaped by the agenda delineated by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 1999a; 2000). This shifted the emphasis from the principle of equality of access to a universally available service, towards targeting specific categories of young people identified as socially unequal in order to solve social problems. The shift is a subtle one in practice. There has been room for overlap and manoeuvre between the old and the new categories of understanding, with similar concepts such as 'equality' or 'exclusion' being interpreted differently in different contexts. The ways in which this conceptual ambiguity has manifested itself in fieldwork practice is another concern for the research, and the analysis which follows draws attention to the tension in meaning and the significance of this for the coherence of youth work practice.

Optimism amongst English youth workers around *Transforming Youth Work* during 2002-3 responded primarily to the promise of improved funding to a hitherto resource-starved service (Smith (A), 2003). However, for some, this promise was compromised by the related requirement to fulfil objectives which did not seem to capture, and might even contradict the principles of youth work. Critics argued that targets and outcomes set with reference to the primacy of Connexions, would not only obscure, but destroy the collective and process-based features of youth work, because despite pretensions to universality, Connexions was fundamentally a targeted, individualised, support-based service working on a deficit model. In this context, Smith (2003) asserted that the informal educational aspects of youth work were being undermined and that government policy was designed to replace youth work with youth development work.

By 2002-3 it was apparent that to fit into government agendas for a coherent policy approach to young people, (Mizen, 2003) youth workers would be required to target their work specifically towards young people defined as NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), who could be categorised as socially excluded or as 'at risk'. Increasingly their energies were being directed towards meeting numerical targets for recorded and accredited outcomes. This included retaining appropriate records, including the evaluations made by young people of their experience of youth work, ostensibly to provide the evidence which would make the youth work intervention accountable to young people and to the state.

Whilst *Transforming Youth Work* was absorbing the attention of youth work commentators and practitioners in 2003, another policy initiative was set to become more significant. *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) was published in response to the recommendations of the *Laming Report*, provoked by the death of Victoria Climbié which indicated that vulnerable children were being failed by public services (TSO, 2003). *Every Child Matters* presages a complete reformation of services for children in England and Wales and although it does not specifically address youth work, youth workers are inevitably drawn into its provisions insofar as they work with children. The statutory changes underpinned by The Children Act (2004) are based upon the needs and interests of individual children. They require that services should be integrated and information shared across a continuum of provision in which at one end, open, leisure-based facilities are offered to children who have no identified needs and at the other end, focused, specialist interventions co-ordinated by a lead professional, is required for children who have complex needs. Under the terms of reference of *Every Child Matters* all services must focus on five outcomes expected for children: that they should be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic wellbeing. These have been almost universally adopted as organising categories within youth work management and practice, corresponding easily with the concern of youth workers for the well-being of the children and young people who engage with youth projects and services.

The five outcomes were reiterated in 2005 in the most recent policy initiative to apply directly to youth workers in England. The title of *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005; 2006) signifies the relationship with *Every Child Matters* and confirms the expectation that youth services are to be reformed in line with children's services in general. In addition, *Youth Matters*, apparently echoing some of the concerns of youth workers in relation to the *Transforming Youth Work* debate and in a nod to its informal educational approach, focuses upon the question of 'things to do and places to

go'. It also incorporates the recommendations of the *Russell Report* (TSO, 2004, 2005) referring to the desirability of youth volunteering.

Needless to say *Youth Matters* has provoked serious discussion in the field. (eg. *Youth and Policy*, 89, 2005). The terms of debate have been little different from those which were beginning to emerge in the wake of *Transforming Youth Work*. It is apparent that *Every Child Matters* and *Youth Matters* in many ways continue, but with more rigour and greater clarity, the intentions which were already inscribed within Connexions. As Jeffs and Smith (2006) argue, there is an important question about whether or not youth workers can maintain their informal educational approach in a climate which stresses support for individuals and implies activity and leisure-based provision for those young people who have 'no' problems. Bernard Davies asks in the context of *Youth Matters*, 'If youth matters, where is the youth work?' (Davies, 2005b). There is anxiety that circumstances are being created by policy in which the traditional meanings and practices associated with youth work might not survive. The movement towards Extended Schools within the formal education field is adding to these anxieties as this seems set to take over some of the informal educational functions of youth work (Davies, 2006).

The policy context in which the research was designed related primarily to the situation in England and it was this policy environment which had sparked the principal debates about the nature of youth work and who should define its parameters and meanings. Whilst there are inevitably differences related to regional circumstances and history, the direction of policy in Wales and Scotland is consistent with England. Welsh youth workers hoped that their alternative to Connexions, *Extending Entitlement*, (National Assembly of Wales Youth Policy Unit, 2000) would enhance the Youth Service in Wales (Williamson, 2002; Murphy and Urack, 2003). This has been shattered by the closure of the independent Wales Youth Agency and the absorption of its powers into the government. In Scotland, the development of a national strategy for youth work is proceeding with explicit reference to *Youth Matters* and to *Transforming Youth Work* (YouthLink Scotland, 2005). Only in Northern Ireland, with its specific concern for community relations and peace-building is there positive affirmation that youth work, supported by a youth service, has an important and relevant contribution to make in its own terms to social stability (DoENI, 1999; 2005). Recent moves towards greater collaboration with Southern Ireland in the validation of professional training seem to presage a further movement away from the direction of change elsewhere in the UK.

In the predominantly English model for coherent state intervention into the lives of young people, youth workers are to be more fully incorporated in centrally managed networks of services which use a common framework of assessment and information sharing and which seek to offer integrated support to children and young people in need. In this process, developing strategies and programmes of action, and setting clear priorities and targets to which workers are accountable and which measure the effectiveness of their practice, are integral. It is the debates which have emerged in relation to these issues which have directed the concerns of the research. However, critical analysis of policy is well advanced. What is urgent in the light of policy direction is to articulate the voice of practice in order to draw attention to those aspects of the youth work intervention which youth workers and young people most value and which make it 'work'. In this report policy will therefore be discussed with reference to the concerns

raised by practitioners, rather than for its own sake. The question is 'what works' in the practice environment, rather than 'what works' for politicians.

1.4 Research context

The development of the research questions was also informed by two significant studies of youth work. The first was the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) funded analysis of the scope of detached and outreach youth work in England and Wales, *Reaching Socially Excluded Young People* (Crimmens et al, 2004). The second was *An Evaluation of the Impact of Youth Work in England* (Merton et al 2004) funded by the DfES.

The JRF research project was undertaken in the wake of the introduction of the Connexions Service and with reference to the role which might be taken by detached and outreach work in that context. The data indicated that most of the youth workers who participated accepted the need for initiatives to address the question of youth transitions in a complex society (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) and that in particular they understood the importance of targeting those defined as 'socially excluded'. These workers generally believed that youth work could play a positive and constructive role within the Connexions partnerships and they were willing to help in facilitating the access of socially excluded young people towards education, training and employment.

Over the 18 month course of the research it was possible to demonstrate real progress in a number of areas of their lives for a sample of young people associated with youth projects (Crimmens et al, 2004:45). Such progress could be very simply mapped against the five outcomes required by *Every Child Matters* and *Youth Matters*.

Despite the good will amongst workers towards policy intentions, and despite evidence of success in formal terms, participants in the JRF research consistently referred to difficulties and tensions in the conditions of practice. Many of the issues which were identified arose from the imposition of organisational practices and terms of reference which did not match the priorities of the worker in the real world of practice. For example, it was evident that insufficient recognition was given to relationship building with young people, to the rhythms of time in youth work which is responsive to young people, and to the problem of power in partnership arrangements with other professional services (Spence, 2004). So even when the practice, aims and objectives complemented the intentions of government policy, youth workers were experiencing a disjuncture between their own priorities and those emphasised in organisational planning, decision making and evaluation.

The second study, *An Evaluation of the Impact of Youth Work in England* was designed to provide a comprehensive, evidence based analysis of the impact of English youth services on young people, their local communities and related services (p5). This study demonstrated variable resourcing across local authorities and a lack of investment in the material infrastructure of local authority youth services. Despite this, and a number of contextual factors which worked to inhibit its effectiveness, the input of youth work was found to contribute to positive and tangible outcomes for young people.

Crucially, the authors of the evaluation identified five significant factors which facilitated the positive impact of youth work. These were, firstly the establishment of positive relationships between young people and youth workers in a local community context; secondly the ability of youth workers to negotiate the terms of the relationship with young people, even when absolute voluntary engagement was absent, in order to enable young people to make their own choices; thirdly, the determination to treat young people holistically as persons rather than with reference to specific issues or problems; fourthly the willingness of youth workers to engage with other services and representatives of local communities in order to mediate on behalf of young people, centring young people in the process; and fifthly, conditions which enabled sustained contact over the long term.

These five contributing factors run against the tide of policy. Despite the fact that the evaluation was funded by the DfES, it is difficult to see where it has had any impact upon government thinking. Nevertheless, the study does make a contribution to the mounting evidence that generic youth work even in straitened and challenging circumstances can make a significant contribution to the well being of young people. At the very least, it offers a basis for youth workers to continue to make the case for their principles and values. It is in a similar spirit that the *Everyday Journey* research has been undertaken. Whether or not the findings affect policy decisions, it is hoped that the research can make a contribution to a broader public understanding of the relevance of professional youth work and that it can further help to clarify the youth work 'voice'.

1.5 Research themes

If youth workers believe that their practice understanding is not being recognised or valued in public debate and organisational decision-making, there is a danger that they will lose confidence in their professionally based understanding and skill, and become confused, demoralised and angry. Because youth workers are struggling to have their voices heard by those in decision-making positions, their frustrations sometimes are being expressed negatively and with less than constructive results. If they wish to avoid adopting reactionary and negative positions on the one hand, or internalising external definitions and language on the other, it seems crucial that youth work practitioners articulate clearly for themselves, and in terms which can be understood and legitimated beyond their own professional enclaves, what it is that makes youth work practice distinctive and effective. As a starting point, the knowledge and understanding generated in effective practice needs to be made coherent, explicit and publicly accessible.

Such work is already proceeding from a range of different perspectives, including a retrieval of the history of youth work (Davies, 1999; Gilchrist, Jeffs and Spence, 2001, 2003, 2006), the development of the theory of informal education (Smith, 1994; Jeffs and Smith, 1999), and the identification of some fundamental youth work principles (Davies, 2005a). The research discussed in this report intends to make a contribution to that emergent body of knowledge. It does so by interpreting and giving shape to the meanings which emerge in the practice environment in relation to four key themes where the language of practice is underdeveloped

and in which it is possible to locate tension in the field.

The first theme concerns the dimensions of everyday practice which do not appear to correspond directly with certain aspects of policy. In relation to this theme, the research focuses upon relationship, dialogue, time and space. Important aspects of this include the unpredictability of the practice environment, the significance of the informal aspects of the work, the place of programmes and buildings and the responsive approach needed in the everyday youth work setting.

The second theme considers the narratives of everyday practice which operate at a variety of levels but which are not accommodated fully in the abstract professional language of 'informal education' or support. Here the research focuses upon the management of expectations between young people and youth workers, and upon conversation associated with day-to-day negotiations between young people, youth workers and other significant adults in the practice environment.

The third theme concentrates upon the question of exclusion. This picks up the language of policy, discusses how this is interpreted in the youth work environment and asks what issues it raises for youth workers and young people.

The fourth returns to the question of accountability. Here the research question relates to the terms and processes of accountability and asks why it is that this element of the work seems so fraught for workers. In doing so, the research considers the place of bureaucracy and evaluation in relation to the demands and principles of face-to-face practice.

These four themes have been used to structure the analysis of the data. They run throughout the Report and also provide the focus for its main sections. These follow from the next Chapter which discusses the methods used in the research.

Chapter 2:

Research Methods and Issues

It's hard to be both researcher and youth worker – the immediacy of the young people means that I resort to this [youth worker] role first.
(Research Diary)

2.1 Overview

The fieldwork was undertaken between February 2005 and July 2006. It involved the researchers participating in the everyday life of a range of youth projects and organisations as a basis for describing and interpreting the experiences of young people and youth workers in the practice setting. This was supplemented by recorded discussions and interviews with young people and youth workers relating to their experiences and understanding of youth work.

A variety of practice situations were included within the research with the intention of ascertaining common concerns, themes and processes which transcended the particularity of each situation. It was anticipated that commonalities would indicate aspects of the youth work which might be considered 'universal' and which would therefore contribute to an exploration of the meaning of youth work from the perspective of practice. The focus of the research was upon the informal and unstructured processes of practice as well as upon its more easily defined programmed features in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the work.

The organisations and youth workers who participated expressed their active interest in a research project which aimed to explore the 'real' nature of youth work, and in particular to think differently about evaluation and accountability in this context. Participants have therefore provided excellent access to their projects and activities, facilitating researcher engagement with young people who use their projects and freely discussing the nature of their work, its meanings and its frustrations both formally in interviews and focus groups, and informally in everyday conversation.

2.2 Stage One: Focus group discussions

In order to ensure that the research themes as identified in the initial proposal were meaningful to practitioners and to add further detail to these, the research began by conducting semi-

structured focus group (FG) discussions with four groups of young people and four groups of youth workers. These were: undertaken in five different regions, including each country in the UK. In total, twenty six young people aged between 10 and 18, and twenty seven youth workers participated. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically in relation to general categories.

For youth workers the main categories identified were:

- the purposes, processes, and values of youth work,
- programme issues,
- professional concerns.

Within each category, youth workers made some strong assertive statements which were often debated in relation to ideas about how things 'are' in comparison with how they 'ought to be', particularly in relation to professional issues. For example, and reinforcing a points made both by Crimmens et al (2004) and by Merton et al (2004), short term organisational agendas were frequently contrasted with the youth workers' belief in the long term efficacy of their interventions.

For young people the discussions were organised into four categories:

- positive aspects of youth work,
- what young people seek from youth work,
- what youth work offers,
- criticisms of youth work.

As might be anticipated from young people who volunteered to participate in a focus group discussion, they were very positive about their engagement with youth organisations and many of their expectations and experiences were congruous with the claims of the youth workers. For example, where youth workers suggested that one of their purposes was to offer 'encouragement', young people indicated that they received 'encouragement', 'support', 'smiles' and had their voices heard. Notably, their main criticisms concerned the requirement that they complete evaluation forms, and the way in which paperwork and computers diverted the attention of youth workers.

A paper based on the results from this stage of the research was produced and sent to all participating organisations, plus professional commentators organised into 'Advisory' and a 'Corresponding' groups (Devanney and Pugh, 2005). Their responses and the research team's identification of major emergent categories and themes were used to inform questions for the next stage of the research.

The focus group data has been incorporated into the overall analysis of the research findings in this report.

2.3 Stage Two: Main study

The main study involved fifteen youth projects with a range of different characteristics. These were selected with reference to their perceived success in engaging with different groups of socially excluded young people. Key contacts from Higher Education youth and community work training agencies throughout the UK assisted the process of selection by identifying projects with whom they had worked and which they believed represented high quality youth work practice, according to their own terms of 'quality'. The research team selected the final sample from these suggestions.

The intention was not to make any claim that the sample would be 'representative' of the whole field but rather that it would cover a range of different approaches with different structures and in different locations. The choice was guided by a number of identified criteria. Firstly, in order to make allowances for difference in policy context, it was necessary to ensure representation from across the UK. Secondly, issues relating to physical location, socio-economic circumstances and structures of equality and identity factors , which might impact upon the nature of social exclusion were considered. Thirdly, the choice was guided by the range of different organisations offering youth work services. Thereafter, selection was based upon different types of explicit aims and objectives, programmes and methods. Finally, it was necessary to consider the practical issue of travel and resources. This meant that, especially in the second year of the research, a larger number of participating projects were located in the north and north east of England than elsewhere.

Envisaged in terms of a variety of continua, selected projects ranged from:

- National to local initiatives;
- Unstructured to highly structured interventions;
- Generic to issue-based approaches;
- Detached to residential locations;
- One-to-one intensive to loose group contact;
- Universally available 'drop-in', to highly targeted provision;
- Open-ended to outcome-led processes.

In each of the projects selected, workers defined their practice as 'youth work'. A number of projects delivered a range of provision and the researchers were able to observe the different parts of this work. The research has examples of work that includes:

- accredited alternative education projects for young people who have been excluded from school;
- adult education type courses, delivering word processing qualifications with older young people (up to the age of 25);
- centre based provision, including summer activity programmes;
- community arts theatre based approaches, with focus on dramatic skills;
- detached youth work, occasionally leading to focused group work;
- drop-ins; some based around information provision, others around a leisure approach;

- intensive support for targeted young people incorporating case work;
- personal development programmes, with an emphasis on residential activities;
- support work undertaken in a school setting, including one-to-one intensive support and after school clubs;
- targeted work for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transexual (LGBT) young people, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people, young mothers, and also work targeted on issues such as reduction of anti-social behaviour and school exclusion.

The fieldwork was divided into two phases, selecting eight projects for the first intensive phase in year one, and visiting the remaining seven in the second phase. Both researchers visited the first project in order to increase comparability of approach and the remaining 14 were divided between them.

To ensure confidentiality, projects are not identified in this report and individuals quoted have been given pseudonyms.

2.4 Researcher involvement with projects

Initial contact with projects involved explaining the purposes of the research and outlining what participation would entail. Organisations were given written information about the research, an agency agreement form, information sheets and consent forms for young people and youth workers, and consent forms for young people's involvement. The preliminary meeting enabled the workers and researchers to arrange schedules for future research visits.

Ethical considerations were addressed through the University of Durham's procedures and researchers had been screened through the enhanced Criminal Records Bureau procedures for those working with children and young people.

From the outset, it was acknowledged that researchers would need to fit into projects and make every effort to not distort the youth work or the dynamics of the situation. Thus, the duration and regularity of engagement was negotiated with reference to the circumstances of the project concerned as well as with regard to practical travel restrictions and the stage of the research. Researcher participation varied from one visit in one project to the continued involvement with another over one year. The depth of engagement also varied according to time available and to the breadth of the work of the agency. In some locations, in-depth understanding was achieved in relation to a specific piece of work. In others, a broad and more general appreciation of the work of the agency was gleaned from participation in a range of 'snapshot' activities and sessions. Consistent emphasis was given to collecting evidence by adopting a flexible and user-friendly approach which in itself borrowed from the methods of youth work and regularly involved the researchers in using youth work-related skills. This enabled the researchers to become acquainted with youth workers and young people in many of the participating projects and to be trusted by them.

There were two aspects to the fieldwork in the main study:

- Observation, participant observation and diaries
- Directed data collection

2.5 Participation, observation and diaries

The researchers spent time participating in the everyday work and activities of thirteen projects as observers and participant-observers. In the remaining two, data was gathered through visits to the projects and interviews with youth workers and young people. The aim of the participant observation approach was to facilitate an informed understanding of what goes on in the everyday life of youth projects including both the practice with young people and the organisational aspects of the work. Within this process researchers were involved in numerous activities including residentials, drop-in sessions, detached sessions and summer programmes. They observed staff meetings, and partnership meetings, debriefing sessions and associated administrative work, and collected copies of project documents, such as annual reports.

The daily observations were recorded by the researchers in semi-structured research diaries (RD). These were written mainly from memory outside the youth work environment although occasionally it was possible to jot down notes *in situ*. The diaries focused on the processes and practices of youth work including the environment created, the people present and the conversations and dialogues between young people and youth workers. They were designed to draw out any particular moments which had seemed important to youth workers and young people, and to recording any particular lines of narrative pursued by project participants.

The participation of the researchers involved them in informal discussion with youth workers and young people and other individuals who were associated with the agency. In these discussions, the researchers mainly sought clarification from participants about their understanding of youth work processes and practices and about the place which youth work occupied in the lives of young people. The main points of these informal discussions were documented by the researchers as supplements to the diaries.

This open-ended approach to data collection was complemented by directed data collection with young people and youth workers.

2.6 Directed data collection

The researchers recorded 51 directed discussions (DD) with youth workers. These explored in more depth with individuals and groups themes which had been discussed in the research proposal, pursued in the focus groups, and recorded in the fieldwork diaries and notes. Full time, part time and trainee youth workers as well as managers and co-ordinators participated in the discussions. Youth workers were particularly asked to reflect upon the meaning and relevance of their work to the young people involved.

Interviews and directed group discussions were conducted with 105 young people, aged

between 12 and 22 years in order to record accounts of their understanding of the nature of their engagement with youth work. The presence or absence of youth workers during these sessions depended on the circumstances encountered in the research setting. Youth workers generally selected the young people to be involved and took responsibility for the return of young people's consent forms. This suggests that the majority of those who took part in the research were more likely to be well known to the youth workers, to have been involved in projects for some time and to be particularly engaged or organised. However, this was not always the case. For example, in two projects the researchers were involved from the beginning of the initiative and were as well known to the young people as the youth workers, and in one project, the youth worker deliberately made an effort to involve those young people who do did not normally come to the fore in other activities.

When the situation allowed, researchers used a range of methods to gather and record the directed data with young people. These included, 'photo walks', time and space lines, drawings, and group discussions between young people and youth workers (Appendix 1).

2.7 Comments and considerations

The research data provides detailed accounts of a wide range of youth provision as well as direct reflections from young people and youth workers. However, it is important, both in relation to this project and future research in this area, to acknowledge some of the issues which arose in relation to research methods during the course of the fieldwork.

An initial aim of the research was to gain direct examples of dialogue within the everyday youth work setting. A first point to note about this is that there are aspects of everyday youth work practice which are not open to observation. The researchers were not able record the processes of one-to-one work, which were by their very nature confidential. Nor were they able to observe those occasions when youth work occurred outside the formal practice arena – at a bus stop, on Christmas day – when professional work spilled into the personal arena. Secondly, it was sometimes very difficult for the researchers to move beyond observing and noting topics of conversation and commenting on the tempo and environment. Although there are verbatim examples of conversation in the data, the details of many mundane, everyday conversations have been lost because there was no way of directly recording them. Thirdly, the 'noise' within some sessions both obliterates many conversations and limits the range of the observer to their immediate personal location. This verbal cacophony is integral to the informal everyday youth work environment, and can slip over into more formal structured sessions. This is one of the realities of youth work. One of the skills of the worker is to achieve meaningful communication in such an environment, to discern from 'noise' what might be said which is significant, to decide which conversations are worth pursuing or re-directing, and which young people are thriving or suffering in this context. This was observed during the research:

> *It can get very busy... There were many different conversations going on at the same time. The worker was negotiating the different conversations, most of which were directed at him. Others were among groups of young people. He had to share his attention among the young*

people, some of whom were demanding a lot of his attention and not considering that other people needed to talk to him too. It was impressive to see him move from the different conversations, going backwards and forward and picking up on certain points mentioned by the young people. (RD)

Fourthly, possibilities for communication in the research were dependent upon the verbal skills and the extent of reflexivity amongst participants. Youth workers were highly articulate about their principles and practices. However, whilst some young people could easily verbalise their understanding, others were less assured. Some were almost monosyllabic in the process of directed data collection. Others were not interested. Again, this reflects something of the reality of youth work itself. To work with young people who are confident and skilled in the use of language in particular settings is a different matter from working with those who are shy, who are unused to expressing opinions, whose verbal skill is under-developed or who resist intrusions into their personal time. There are clearly issues in this with regard to representation and the quality of data in relation to consultation with young people and young people's evaluations of their experience of youth work.

On occasion, participative methods such as a 'photo-walk' which involved a young person walking around their local area with the researcher and photographing places which had meaning for them, added a different communicative dimension and sometimes encouraged a more relaxed discussion. However, in other situations, young people were unable to move beyond describing particular activities which they had enjoyed through youth work, highlighting its 'extra-ordinary' rather than its everyday qualities. They were not self-conscious about the place which youth work occupied in their lives other than the opportunity offered for new experiences and activities. It is possible that this may indeed be a truthful reflection of the benefit of youth work to them. However, the observations of the researchers suggest that other things happen in their informal contact with youth workers which are taken-for-granted, unremarkable for young people even though they may be of some significance in terms of their life-course.

The quality of the data collected was directly related to the method used and to the time spent in any given situation. Where observation and participation occurred over the long term, the level of trust built between researcher, youth workers and young people facilitated particularly privileged insights into the qualities and problems of the everyday world of young people and youth workers in the youth work setting. Where the participation was short term, workers were more likely to attempt to talk about the best of their practice and to offer whatever information was needed. In such situations too, the young people chosen to speak to the researchers were more likely to be those who were most clearly benefiting from the youth work process. In the short term research engagement, directed data collection sometimes provided a somewhat self-conscious view of youth work practice. This is useful, but by definition it does not include the silences - those aspects of practice which are suppressed or unacknowledged in the discourse. In this sense, it is the diary recordings of the longer term observations which yield the most revealing insights.

In those projects where the researchers spent most time, developing informal conversation with

workers and young people encouraged reflexivity in discussions. Sometimes workers offered retrospective information. This was particularly relevant when their route to professional youth work had been via their experiences of youth projects as young people. However, it must be recognised that the research presence inevitably impacts upon the everyday dynamic. In particular, it is possible that the process of directed data collection provoked discussion of issues and themes which would not ordinarily arise in practice. It was important that the researchers were sensitive to the underlying principles of youth work practice values and informed about professional processes and boundaries.

The researchers as participants were subject to the same rhythms of youth work and young people's lives as the youth workers and it was necessary for the research to be responsive. This sometimes meant adjusting plans and timetables for as one youth worker remarked, 'Every day is different!' The researchers learned about the intricacies of practice by sharing the young people's and youth workers' space in projects, by listening to and participating in the conversations, the challenges, the humour, the questioning and the relationships, the unpredictability, the silences and the chaos.

2.8 Research complementing youth work

The data collected during this research project is multi-layered and reflects the complexity of life in the youth work setting. Whilst the notion of focusing on 'the everyday' has some problems in terms of recording and prioritising data, its openness to the informal, the unstructured, and the inarticulate has facilitated documentation of some of the 'realities' of life in youth projects which are seldom otherwise recorded.

The open-ended process of data collection has provided evidence of workers dealing spontaneously with situations which arise unplanned, reacting constructively to whatever issue a young person may arrive with and having to stop whatever else they were doing to address this. There are records of 'nothing happening' such as spending a detached session on empty streets, of 'difficulties' such as young people refusing to engage in structured sessions. Overwhelmingly though, the data shows positive and constructive interaction between workers and young people. For example, it includes observations of 'small moments' such as a young person apologising to a worker during a detached session. It also records different levels of interaction such as the process in which workers manage to give patient care and attention to one individual whilst simultaneously working with a group and a programme. Other observations describe youth workers attempting to balance their time between organisational matters, such as attending meetings and completing paperwork, maintaining a building whilst at the same time not only undertaking face-to-face practice, but also preparing for sessions with the young people.

From the beginning the research has aimed to be a complement to the youth work itself and thereby contribute to the reflective practice of youth workers and to the developmental processes of young people involved in the research. In gaining the trust of youth workers and young people, the researchers have been privileged to glimpse aspects of the principles, practices

and negotiated meanings of the work which are seldom available outside the practice situation. One of the values of the research is that it has been able not only to appreciate the difficulties and down-sides of the work, but also to observe the foundational work which underpins much of the visible practice. Ultimately, the data discussed here offers some insight into the realities and intricacies of everyday practice rarely considered in final, official accounts of youth work.

Chapter 3:

Every Day is Different

He discussed how young people are often unpredictable and it's impossible to determine if they're going to turn up – particularly for structured events. He said that it's 'just young people' – he gave an example of a football event that had been planned with some young people and no one turned up. It happened that the mackerel had come in – which doesn't happen very often, so all the young men had gone mackerel fishing. He described this as a ritual that was significant to the young people.
(RD)

3.1 Behind the scenes

Exploration of the everyday world of youth work involved consideration of the informal as well as the formal, on the less obvious aspects of the daily life of youth projects. It meant looking 'behind the scenes,' beyond the public narratives of practice and considering the ways in which practice coincided with the daily lives of young people. So for instance, the research was interested in the processes leading to an 'extra-ordinary' event such as a residential, which might be the culmination of many weeks, if not months, of preparation and development, as well as the event itself.

The voluntary participation of young people presents opportunities for creative and spontaneous youth work interventions which can lead to developmental and structured work. However, voluntary participation also makes the everyday unpredictable. Regardless of the planning of programmes, organisation of events and the regularity of groups and opening hours of buildings, the underlying rhythm of practice is subject to the rhythms of the everyday lives of young people and must be responsive to the parameters of those lives. Youth work is only one feature of their social landscape. Other institutions such as family and school dominate and different formal and informal relationships impact upon their actions and emotions. Thus the circumstances and conditions of young people's contact with youth projects are regularly subject to events 'off stage'.

The fact that there is no such thing as a typical day was seen by many youth workers as one of the attractions of the job. 'I love it because I think my days are so different every day' (DD). Workers are adept at dealing with changes of tempo and mood, of responding to crises, of creating form and shape from mundane or volatile situations. This adaptability is a feature of

their professional creativity which workers understand as crucial to their ability to respond to and affect the lives of young people. Not surprisingly therefore, the workers experience tensions between this and pre-determined agendas which they often discussed with the researchers, and which was observed to take the form of a struggle between the realities of face-to-face practice and the abstractions of bureaucratic requirements.

3.2 Responding to young people

The willingness of young people to access youth projects is responsive to what is on offer and to how far this meets their needs and interests. Even when young people are referred and their participation is not voluntary, as Merton et al (2004) imply, youth workers adapt and work in such a way as to encourage a voluntary engagement. A number of instances were observed when it was apparent that despite their voluntary presence in a building, young people were refusing any meaningful communication with the youth worker.

By the same token there were other occasions when despite having been referred to the agency, the young people reacted positively to the sympathetic approach of youth workers. These observations do not undermine the argument for the voluntary principle but rather suggest that the terms in which it is generally discussed are too simple. What is significant in the ideal of voluntarism is that youth work can only proceed effectively if the young people involved actively participate in and take some responsibility for the relational elements of the youth work process.

It could be argued that such active participation is necessary to satisfactory outcomes in any person-centred service and that what is true of youth workers in terms of the need to 'win' young people to the process is also true of teachers for example. However, youth work takes place in a different environment from that of compulsory institutions such as schools, and predominantly in time and space which young people identify as their own. The youth project must therefore hold some attraction. Even when young people are present as a result of referral it is essential that they experience something different from and better than the alternatives on offer if they are to cooperate. However projects are accessed, youth workers are constrained to offer something which young people cannot find elsewhere.

3.3 Responding to young people in their own time and place

The motivating idea of the universalism which has traditionally characterised youth work, is that young people in general have leisure time needs and interests specific to their youthfulness which ought to be met at a collective, public level. However, a range of social factors, including finite resources in the public sector, the recognition of specific social needs in specific locations and the exercise of political power at a local as well as a national level mean that in reality, local provision has always been targeted at those areas and those groups of young people where leisure time needs have been thought to be greatest. Put simply, youth projects are much more likely to be found in poor than in affluent areas, a larger concentration of resources are to be

found in urban rather than rural areas, and youth work has dealt as much with the social and personal problems of specific groups in specific locations as with the developmental social education of youth *per se*.

Yet because of the ideal of universalism, it has been possible for youth work to avoid being perceived by young people as simply a 'problem-orientated' institution. If any young person can access youth provision voluntarily in their leisure time and simply for its own sake, then any problems which they bring with them can be contextualised, and dealt with in a manner which is negotiable. Crucially this avoids labelling the young person as 'a problem' and enables them to control the pace of discussion. The importance of the leisure-based approach and the primacy of the potentiality model which feeds into the informal educational approach are highly significant for youth work in this context. However, this set of principles and practices has practical implications for the work in the field.

Many youth workers operate predominantly in locations which are defined by social and economic problems and frequently by a lack of public provision not just for young people, but for anyone. Photographs taken by three young people in the research to highlight significant places in their lives suggest a distinct absence of leisure facilities in their locality. Those facilities which do exist frequently exclude the young and other groups. For example, an Asian young man identified a public house which he did not feel free even to photograph, as 'whitemanland'. In one location, a young woman photographed a local garage and a shop which she explained were important places where young people could complete forms with a detached youth worker when they were attempting to access Keyfund[1] money (Appendix 1).

Those who use youth provision in such areas might do so simply for lack of alternatives and might not be seeking anything other than opportunities to spend some time in space which is orientated towards their leisure needs. Youth workers perceive this as a legitimate use of their resources. They also understand that not every young person who comes into their ambit requires or would be responsive to personal attention:

> *People talk good stuff about youth work, but sometimes it's just, young people come and they get absolutely nothing. They just come and they go again and that's it ...Sometimes that's just the reality of what we do. Sometimes it's just providing a service for people. They come one week, and go away and never come back again, or even remember, or ever even talk about it again. That needs to be highlighted somewhere really.*
> (FG - youth worker)

Even when young people are simply accessing youth projects as a space in which to conduct their social lives in safety and away from the supervision of more controlling authorities, those projects are providing a social service. In one case, detached youth workers were concerned about the dangers to young women in an area where they were congregating, and issued personal alarms. Mainly the service offered is understood as a social benefit by outsiders and by

[1] Keyfund is an organisation which pays grant to groups of young people for schemes which they have identified and are organising themselves.

young people themselves as 'keeping them off the streets'.

> *Without the [project] there would be a lot of unhappy teenagers running about, going mental, smashing things up, and because they don't have anything else to do.*
> (FG -young woman)

Young people frequently understand the primary meaning of youth projects and the input of youth workers in terms of recreational opportunities:

> Tom: *There's not much to do. The only good thing is the [project]. That's why we're here every day*
> Mark: *And the football court*
> Tom: *Yeah and the football court that's the only two good things...*
> (DD – young men)

Youth workers acknowledge the importance of recreation to young people and they respond by offering programmes, activities and events which they perceive to be of use and interest to the young people in their localities. However these are seldom ends in themselves for workers, but rather a means towards the development of other aspects of their work.

3.4 Programmes and timetables

The art of programming allows for the possibility of recruitment for development work. Recreational opportunities provide a baseline for encouraging some young people to form a deeper association with the project, including the participation in planning and organising future events and activities. Project timetables can thus provide a dynamic framework in which the recreational and educational interests of different groups of young people can be negotiated and realised. Meanwhile, the content of programming can facilitate the achievement of policy directives, but only if relevant in the immediate circumstances:

> *... it's always changing and if young people don't want to do a project it's changing and it has to always be with their needs as well. Like the health and fitness programme that I do it was something that the young people wanted plus it's something that the government's trying to tackle as well with obesity and keeping fit. So if something else comes and young people are interested in that then it's always got to change.*
> (DD – youth worker)

Creating order and opportunity through timetabling and programmed activities is an integral aspect of professional youth work. Here the expectations of young people, youth workers, managers and politicians might overlap and be achieved. However, it makes a difference whether these timetables emerge from the exigencies of face-to- face practice, or from the managerial demands of organisational planning. In both cases, the content of programming is relevant to issues of social exclusion and problems of youth 'transitions' (MacDonald et al, 200 but whether these respond to the real situations and issues identified in the practice process,

or to abstractions based upon 'objective' evidence has implications for how a youth project is perceived by young people and workers, for the type of young people who participate, for the type of outcomes emphasised and for the structure of the working day.

3.5 Centring young people

The researchers sometimes observed tension between the expectations of young people for simple recreation and the anxieties of workers relating to their responsibilities towards educational process and policy expectations. When this occurred, the self-consciousness of the worker and the instrumental nature of their interventions were sensed by the young people who simply discontinued the conversation:

> *The session was running when we got there. There were eight young men playing pool and using the microwave to heat up lunch (chicken wings and pot noodles). One worker had brought in a salad and was showing the young people her dinner, asking them what they would eat and what they thought was healthy food. Mostly the lads played pool and the workers supervised. There was a little bit of discussion about respect, talking about the language the young people used towards their parents. The young people talked about a young woman who was getting a police escort to school because otherwise she was going to 'get battered'. The workers challenged this, asking how they would feel if they were being bullied or isolated at school. The young people didn't really engage with this conversation.* (RD)

Whilst opportunities can be seized in a recreational situations to introduce organisational and policy agendas, great skill and sensitivity is required to do so successfully. Essential to this is that the workers know and are comfortable with the young people involved. Learning about young people as people is the crucial underpinning of developmental educational work. As one young woman explained, youth work is different from other services because: 'youth workers get to know you', 'go out of their way to help you', and they 'treat you as an individual' (RD). Similarly one young man told the researcher, 'You have as much of a say as them'. He said that this was about having respect for each other and that they 'Don't talk down to you like a teacher', that they are 'friendly' (RD). However, achieving such levels of mutual respect and trust is not always an easy process:

> Malcolm: *You can be just chatting and it can be just an attitude change, somebody's taking time to speak to you, asking how you're doing rather than ignoring you or giving you some verbal, that's a change, progress ...*
> Gary: *Sometimes young lads will come in. 'How's it going?' 'Grunt,' 'Are you looking for a job?' 'Grunt.' Eventually -if you keep it up. But it's up to us to keep being positive and welcoming...And maybe that's what's been lacking in some young people's experiences up* to that date...
> (DD-youth workers)

Learning about young people does not always take place in conventional settings. Workers

who understand practice as informal education are alert and responsive to opportunities which present themselves in all the everyday situations when they have contact with young people:

> *A lot of conversations – serious conversation takes place when the worker is driving. There is less eye contact with the worker- and the young women know that they are not going to stop the car – so 'they feel they can ask you things.'*
> (RD)

In building relationships, it is impossible to force the pace, and although the youth workers in the research were nothing if not persistent and optimistic, they often had to step back as well as forward in order to bring young people to trust them. Despite their personal investment in the process, they also had to adopt a professional approach and not take slights or setbacks personally:

> *One young woman was talking to the youth workers about what they do as their job and was joking that all they seem to do 'is sit around'. She was asking about how they feel when people are sometimes not very nice to them. The worker told a story about how one young person left one day after calling him a dickhead. The following day the young woman came back in and didn't mention it as if she didn't even remember saying it. They talked about how they need to treat every day differently. They did not want to bring that issue back up with the young person so they moved on from it.*
> (RD)

Centring the young people themselves is crucial to the process of winning their voluntary engagement. To move young people forward whilst at the same time affirming this centrality usually involves grounding developmental and educational activities in their world and ceding to them some control over the pace and direction of conversation and future planning:

> *We're doing a programme. It's about looking at them, and their community and where they are. And some of it's just about sitting down, like last night it was just about telling their story, about their group, when they first met. And we did a road map of where they went to and what friends left and who came in and who joined and what did they get up to when they were 12, and what did they get up to when they were 13. And when did they start doing different things, and when did girls come on the scene and that sort of thing. And got to now and looked at where they are going, and we were looking at other stuff like the relationships and next week we're going to do this thing with sand and Lego and stuff and build their community on the square*
> (FG – youth worker)

Keeping young people at the heart of youth work practice requires constant vigilance especially when their culture, expectations and personal attitudes are disharmonious with the rationality and schedules of organisational life and may be antagonistic to any expression of adult or official authority. Although many of the young people who participated in interviews and discussions with the researchers were able to understand and respond to organisational rhythm and expectations, and as such 'performed' well in terms of explicit organisational agendas, not

ll were and the everyday lives of youth projects were frequently marked by unpredictability, nreliability, dissent, and sometimes disorder.

.6 Unpredictability

rop-in and detached sessions are by nature unpredictable - even if the youth workers hemselves have aims and objectives for the session. They do not know which young people if any -they will be dealing with and in what combination and mood. A flavour of this can be leaned from extracts from the research diary relating to a session in a youth unit attached to a chool:

Throughout the morning young people keep popping in ... There seems to be a core group of young people who always come in at break times to talk to the workers. There is a lot of negotiation with the young people, for example this may be getting them to go to their lessons on time because they will get in trouble which then may jeopardise whether they can come back over to the mobile. One young woman in particular keeps leaving notes for the worker...(she came in four times during the day)....

The [activity] group did not take place today as the young people had other activities on, including drama. Most had come during the day to let the worker know that they could not attend. They were going to go through ground rules for the carnival with the group during the session. The workers used this time for planning. There are a lot of things that need to be arranged, including getting more young people involved, advertising the workshops, parental consent, safety of young people, consent from the school as the workshops are during school time.

Two of the trainee youth workers were around today. They both seem to be struggling with the NVQ course ...

One young woman who had come into school to sit an exam came into the mobile to talk to the worker. He had done one-to-one work with this young woman (she is the one who they took to a hostel). They talked about lots of different issues, what she was doing for a job, her plans for college, how things were at home with her mother, her relationship with her step father, her social activities ...

... The group of young people who put the gig on last week came in. The workers had supported by helping with the arrangements and also going along to supervise on the evening. They brought a thank you card for the workers for supporting them. As they were about to leave he asked one of them about their behaviour at the gig. Apparently she had spent a lot of time with a young man who already had a girlfriend. The worker asked how it looked to be with someone else's boyfriend, if this was right, how she would have felt, how his girlfriend would have felt. This was all done in a humorous, light hearted way.
(RD)

Whilst timetabled and programmed sessions create a background sense of predictability and help create boundaries, there can be no way of second guessing when a crisis will erupt or wher the immediate needs of young people will impinge on this ordered framework. Similarly, both workers and young people use timetabled contact for discussions which sometimes have very little, if any relationship with programme content but which are responsive to the developing worker-young person relationship or to a particular issue raised by the young person. Bringing the external, abstract agendas of policy and management into the frame can be diversionary and counter-productive to this process.

3.7 Unreliability

Unreliability and unpredictability are related in youth work:

> *Over lunch with the two youth workers we were talking about the unpredictability within youth work and the worker gave an example of the boys group they had been working with. They had been planning to go kayaking with the group two Saturdays ago (they had been trying to arrange this on my last project visit). When it came to the Saturday the young people who were supposed to be going did not turn up, some were grounded, others did not want to go or had other things planned. It so happened the male worker was able to meet up with six other young people on the street and arranged to take them instead. This included some new contacts for the project and young people who they did not know particularly well but they all had a good day out kayaking.*
> (RD)

Whilst unpredictability can be and is used constructively by youth workers, the unreliability of some young people can be disheartening. A great deal of work and effort might be put into a particular activity or event, including by the young people themselves, only to have some people fail to show up at designated times and places:

> *There had been seventeen young people coming on the trip but seven had dropped out either that morning or the Friday before. Young people had expected others to be there, particularly the young woman who was the only one from her school and didn't know anyone else.*
> (RD)

> *The martial arts session was cancelled because only two young people showed up...The workers decided that it was not worth going ahead with it. One of the young men from yesterday had planned to come but his dad had contacted him at the last minute and so he changed his plans.*
> (RD)

Despite the discouragement which it brings, such unreliability is understood as an intrinsic part of the everyday world of youth work:

You come in and you go, ' Nobody turned up last night!' And you go, 'Oh, that's happened to me loads of times, I bet you they'll all be there next week.' And then you find out, 'Oh there was such a thing on and they all got a free lift to it.' And you go, 'Oh, that's why!'
(DD – youth worker)

I think it's difficult for youth workers not to be hurt by the fact that sometimes people don't turn up or people sometimes do things differently or say things they shouldn't. And I know it sounds quite cold and blunt but you've got to learn to balance that so you've got to see where you're coming from with the young person because a week's a long time in a young person's life and they mightn't turn up but they mightn't turn up because they don't want to speak to you or anything, they mightn't turn up because something's happened in their life and they've completely forgot. They don't all walk around with filofaxes and computers and stuff like that. And I think we've got to realise that and some people do and some people don't.
(DD – area manager)

It is important to the youth work process that such unreliability is not allowed to impact upon the quality of the continuing investment of time and energy of the young people involved. Whilst it is undermining of outcome-led work and appears to indicate failure to establish in young people the importance of a particular social rule relevant to employability, what is actually significant in youth work is that the worker does not use unreliability as an excuse to withdraw and thus affirms the importance of the young person apart from their behaviour. This makes an important contribution to winning loyalty which in the long run can affect the young person's attitude towards reliability.

3.8 Dissent

Even when young people do 'turn up,' their full participation in programmed activities can never be guaranteed. Expressions of dissent can range from simply 'switching off' to active aggression:

But you know, if they're not enjoying it, you know, because they start speaking through it. And you've got to say to them, 'Right, come on. Listen.' Because it can be quite embarrassing if there is someone doing a bit of a spiel and they start yapping through it, or their mobile phones go off and they start speaking into their mobile phone. And you know right away, that they're not interested in this.
(DD – youth worker)

The other group of young lads were hanging around outside when we were leaving the building. Some were hiding around the corner and waiting until we left to try and get in. Apparently they had been allowed in the building by the female worker earlier for a couple of hours. This did not seem to stop them behaving badly. They threw chips at us as we walked down the street. ...They had been used to being allowed in the building by a worker who has since left and it seems they have not adapted to the way the project had changed.
(RD)

In the main, workers attempt to manage dissent through negotiation. Although voluntary participation gives young people some power, this is not absolute and there are conditions and responsibilities consequent upon the use of youth facilities. When the dissent is simply related to disinterest in an activity then it is usually possible for workers to use the situation for further conversation about ground rules for social behaviour and also about why particular subjects are of little interest.

However, there are occasions when dissent signals a break-down in relationships between youth workers and young people. Sometimes it is important for youth workers to admit that they can make no headway with particular groups. Their interventions are not appropriate for all young people at all times. Changing the conditions of provision for young people or ending youth worker support can, on the other hand, provoke dissent because young people perceive this as a betrayal of their trust. There are important issues here for organisations in relation to changes in policy direction, staff changes and teamwork and relationships with partner organisations.

3.9 Disorder

Disorder can occur in a variety of contexts and is related to unpredictability. Sometimes it appears when workers attempt to introduce structured, outcome-led activity with groups who have volatile relationships with each other or who have not yet established settled inter-personal relationships with the workers:

> *They were going to be making chicken curry with rice and naan bread and then chocolate cake. The worker suggested that they do the curry in two batches so that everyone could have a go at the cooking. The two girls who are good friends took over immediately and began the cooking. There was loads of noise and people moving from one job to the next, getting bored with doing what they were doing, telling others they were doing their jobs wrong and trying to intervene. The two sisters were bickering a lot during most of the session. The workers were trying to help them out and keep calm and for quite a while let them get on with the cooking themselves. The rest of the group arrived about fifteen minutes later and this again caused disruption. All of them were complaining about cutting onions and started to open the windows, climbing on the tables, at one point a computer keyboard was dangling out of the window!*
> (RD)

It might also erupt when young people are taken out of their normal environment, when they have no pre-knowledge of social rules of behaviour, when they are excited by the new experience, or when they are together in large numbers and in groups where there is no leadership or direction for their behaviour.
Persistent disorder was most noticeable amongst referred groups of young people. For example:

> *There were a number of behavioural issues while the young people were at the park- one young man got involved in intimidating some skaters- (apparently the worker had quite strong words about this- I was with another part of the group at this time). Some of the*

skaters let the young men borrow a skate board- they had a bit of a go and then tried to steal it. As we were leaving they went on to the basketball court, there were some younger boys on the court who they gave some hassle to, an older bloke came over and intervened telling the young men to 'fuck off'- which didn't go down well. One of the young men got a stone and was going to throw it but didn't.
(RD)

What was significant here is that in such groups, all participating young people were characterised in relation to 'problems.' Whereas in open groups, present on the basis of universality, there was a mixture of young people and variability in behaviour, with some young people leading and apparently influencing the behaviour of others, in the referred groups, the concentration of behavioural difficulties and the absence of long-standing friendships or even association between the young people involved meant that there were no internal moderating factors. All responsibility for order was thus transferred to workers whose roles began to shift from befriending and advocacy towards policing and controlling, militating against the possibility of gaining the trust and co-operation, and therefore the voluntary engagement of the young people. The difficulties of maintaining order observed when youth workers took responsibility for referred groups highlight issues relating to youth work methods which are framed in educational rather than therapeutic or policing terms. Youth work is not the most appropriate approach for all groups of young people and it is important to recognise this in the context of partnership working.

3.10 Small steps

A significant role played by youth workers in the research was to act as a bridge between the everyday worlds, irregular life styles and insecurities of the young people concerned and those representatives and features of the outside world which were perceived as antagonistic, challenging or threatening or which were simply unknown. This might range from intervening directly to divert young people from dangerous activities, through offering opportunities to participate in events, activities and excursions which might otherwise be outside the range of the everyday, to the development of cross community work in relation to ethnicity or faith, through encouraging those who were alienated from or refusing school back into the classroom:

The girl... came back over ...again asking for a letter from the worker to get out of her lesson for the teacher. She was being really negative, looked unhappy and said that she was going to go home. The worker tried to reason with her and encourage her to stay in school, then followed her out of the room to talk to her.
(RD)

It is because youth work includes an informal flexibility that it is able to connect with and encourage ongoing contact with any young people who are in danger of exclusion from, or are already excluded from more structured social institutions and it is because of this that it is able to take up successfully its 'bridging' role between institutions and between young people and the outside world.

Youth workers are, like, in between a teacher and a parent because they're not so official but they're there to kind of help us take the right paths. A lot of the time when there's older people in positions of power you tend not to listen to them, it's just that rebellious streak I suppose. But when you've got somebody that's informal and they talk to you on your level and give you advice, it's a lot easier to listen to it because you can see that they sympathise – they know where you're coming from and whatever they say really is in your best interest. and not something else.'
(DD-Young woman)

One of the contributions which seemed to be of most consequence to young people and their potential for dealing with the wider social world and other institutions was the way in which youth workers were able to recognise and work on the 'little things' which could be major obstacles to young people's confidence and achievement.

The short steps. Its about breaking down barriers that they put in their own way, ' I can't do that because, I can't make a phone call because,' and you take the barriers away from them, 'I can't. I don't know how to get a house because I don't know where the housing department is.' Well we'll take you, we'll go with you. Trying to break down the barriers to make it easier for them. Because sometimes they put up this shield, 'I can't.' There's no such word as 'can't,' ' won't' or 'don't want to.'
(DD – youth worker)

I basically had, like before I came, it was an opportunity to get out of the house because before I didn't have the confidence at all. I mean I wouldn't go to put the bin out. I've got two dogs and I wouldn't stand in the garden with the dogs or anything, and that went on for over a year. I never left the house unless I went for a doctor's appointment or something like that and now pretty much all the time, I'm in a day if that. So it's just sort to get used to going out again where I felt safe.
(DD – young woman)

It took us 18 months just to get a young woman to take her coat off.
(DD – youth worker)

Similar accounts of the amount of time which might be taken to establish trust or to encourage one individual or a group of young people to participate actively in the youth project in order that they might deal more effectively with the wider society can be found in other research and accounts of practice (Brew, 1943; Crimmens et al, 2004; Montagu, 1954; Redfearn, 2003). The start of the developmental journey is usually described in terms of a pre-history which involves patient and sensitive efforts on the part of the worker to listen to the young people concerned and to acknowledge the significance of their fears and difficulties and to encourage them to take small steps forward.

When a trip is suggested this is often met with a scared response. She said they have to find a 'confident moment' before suggesting something like this, an 'educational trip.' They spend a lot of time investigating the young women's hopes and fears before a trip would

take place, this can include fear of going over a bridge, sleeping away from home, using escalators, sleeping on the ground floor of a building, sleeping in a bed, 'real issues'. They try to accommodate people while also addressing fears.
(RD)

The amount of time taken to achieve a small and almost intangible outcome can be long and tortuous and the efforts of the worker may flounder along the way. Yet, time and again workers spoke of young people contacting the project after absences – sometimes of years – based upon the young person acknowledging a need that the youth project fulfilled, when the workers had never been sure that any significant outcome had been achieved in the initial contact.

The most prolific things I've got sitting in my office are letters that we've had from young folk, saying, 'Oh my god! Just walking in through the [door], the thing the project gave me was a smile every day.' Because she was in a situation where everything was really negative. Walking in for twenty minutes every day, there was a smile, a face glad to see her when everything else was out to get her as far as she was concerned. And it was at the time. Letters that will make you bleed with tears and it's just, its simple things like that...
(FG -youth worker)

The unstructured or partially-structured nature of just 'being there' and of being able to be responsive in the moment, is not just an important feature of youth work practice, it is a foundational element of that practice. And it is a feature of the voluntary participation of young people.

Yet it is difficult, if not impossible to accredit the input of time in the immediacy of the everyday in terms of its longer term consequences or even necessarily to recognise it as significant for the purposes of recording. Some moments can only be judged significant with hindsight. Consequently, a key element of the youth work approach is relegated to its margins in organisational systems. This in turn impacts upon the assessment of youth workers about what is important to managers, funders and policy makers and in order to 'perform' effectively, they 'talk up' the significance of some aspects of their work and muffle or silence other aspects according to this assessment (Williamson, 2003). Even when organisations might be sympathetic to 'small steps' and everyday achievements, the dominant 'performance' discourse makes it difficult for workers to value their own achievements at this level. The realities of everyday practice are often conceptualised by workers as belonging to a different category of information from that required for the purposes of publicly justifying their work.

3.11 Real life and organisations

External, abstract policy and management agendas can be counter-productive if they are brought instrumentally into the process of relationship-building. Moreover, the everyday life of youth projects which are responsive to young people, and which are dealing with behaviour patterns which are not necessarily in the control of the youth worker, can never fully correspond with the linear and mechanistic character of organisational rationality which suggests a systematic approach involving predictability, reliability, conformity and order. Managing the

tension between reality and organisational demands is therefore an inevitable and inherent part of the youth worker's and youth work manager's responsibility. This task is particularly significant in view of the nature of many of the young people who come to the attention of youth workers and whom youth workers seek to influence.

Anderson et al (2005) have suggested that different groups of young people view and experience time differently in relation to their experiences, security and expectations of life. Those who do not expect any significant change in their social or physical location over their life time live much more for the moment than do those who have expectations of an improved life in the future, who plan their present lives according to future reference points. Many young people who might be defined as 'socially excluded' and who make most use of youth projects fall particularly into the former category. They are entirely present-orientated in both time and place and they often find it difficult to engage with organisations which are future-oriented in their planning processes and requirement for pre-determined outcomes, or which make demands upon them in relation to the social rules of an 'external world' which lies outside both their experience and their imagination.

> *The other aspect to time constraints is that young people... see time as the here and now. Its not two years down the line, its not six months down the line. Its what's happening tomorrow, this week, and that's why trying to engage them into the process of funding programmes and long term strategies to develop skate parks and develop youth enquiry centres and music centres and so forth and you're saying this is four years of time at a minimum that you're committing yourself to. I'm not going to be here in four years time, I'm out of here... I'm going to do something but I'm not going to be here in four years.*
> (FG – youth worker).

In dealing with young people who are 'at risk' or 'socially excluded' youth workers are constrained to work with their present-orientation and to represent youth work organisations to them in an unthreatening light. At the same time, the educational perspectives of youth wor intend to bring about positive change for the young people concerned. Therefore the inclinatior of the youth worker is also to encourage future orientation, and to broaden experience in order to stimulate the imagination of young people towards wider possibilities for their lives. Howeve this is always dependent upon the quality of work in the present. Ironically, as one worker implied, when youth work is successful in moving a young person beyond the needs of the present, it is likely that the youth project will be no longer needed, or as other workers noted, the success might be claimed by another organisation!

> *I'm always up for partnership work, but because they find it hard to reach their targets. For example the PCT, the sexual health team are expected to work with so many young people. How are they expected to work with so many young people if they don't know any young people? So I'm finding over the years more and more agencies are linking in with us to get the young people. But then they're going away with the targets or the credit but then the youth service are not. But it's us that sort of gets them to speak to the young people, build up the trust*
> (DD – youth worker)

The dynamic, responsive characteristics of youth work, which is manifest to a large extent in the personalities of workers, do not reflect the static and bureaucratic rationality of organisations, even if the aims of workers and organisational policy are fully in harmony. In order to maintain their ability to work with young people in their everyday realities, youth workers must firstly deal with the present. They recognise that there are times when young people are at their most productive and engaged when they are allowed to pursue their legitimate interests and desires, in whatever order they wish, and in a space of time to be determined by the young people themselves – until their interest wanes or until something else diverts their attention. It is from the opportunities presented in such youth-directed space that youth workers begin to forge relationships of trust upon which more directive and outcome-led involvement may be pursued. This accords with one of the principles of youth work identified by Davies (2005a) – to work with young people as young people rather than as future adults. When this happens, young people perceive that youth workers are more understanding of their world than other professionals. It is this which facilitates the possibility of youth workers being able to support young people to participate more effectively in personal, family and institutional life. In a comprehensive approach to young people, this is important because the trust which they invest in youth workers can facilitate privileged access to their private world:

> *The worker had been working with a family, as part of this she attended a case conference, during this she was warned off going to the house – other agencies would not go there alone and had found the family to be extremely difficult. The worker had a really positive relationship with the family. One of the parents had offered to volunteer with the project. The worker felt this was partly because of their informal approach [and] that they go there to 'offer a service' rather than 'do terrible things' which is how social services/ police etc are often viewed.*
> (RD – partnership meeting)

The emphasis here upon 'service' is related to the value of centring the young person and prioritising their needs over that of the organisation or policy. However, to achieve this demands some looseness of time and space in the working day of youth projects to allow for the unpredictable, unreliable, dissenting and disordered so that workers can respond adequately and appropriately to those young people, defined as socially excluded, whose lives are not shaped by any rationality which corresponds with that of formal organisations.

This does not mean that the work of youth projects is running counter to the objectives of organisations and policy makers, but rather that the time frames, the rhythms and the structures of youth work are not synchronic with those of centralised organisational bureaucracies. It also has consequences for short, medium and long term views. In particular, the investment of worker time required in the informal spaces of the everyday in order to work towards the possibility of young people participating in more structured and goal-orientated programmes and activities is much greater than can be reasonably accommodated by the conditions of current practice. This has enormous implications for the relevance of organisational techniques of evaluation and for the place which bureaucratic systems occupy in the landscape of youth work. It contributes towards explaining why administration is experienced as being 'oppositional' to face-to-face practice.

I ran a project for fifteen weeks. For seven of those weeks I sat around ...on my own for an hour while nobody turned up. The other eight weeks were brilliant; we got loads done. But that whole, 'Yes, this is happening', 'Fifteen weeks we had full attendance'; 'They completed whatever,'- it has to be more real! Statistics and outputs don't interest me; they interest the funder or the policy-maker. It's, what issues were there? How did you deal with them? Why did the young people then keep coming back? What were they getting out of it? Because that's what you're going to use for your group.
(DD – youth worker)

Yet workers do have responsibilities towards their employing organisations and they are faced with the realities of organisational time and rationality. Their own everyday reality would in any case include administration in order to run programmes and to initiate and follow up face-to-face work. Working at both a face-to-face level and an organisational level is therefore intrinsic to youth work practice. In current circumstances, this involves working at one level with a perspective which relates to the social inclusion agendas of policy. These highlight institutional participation and outcomes for young people and measure this through target setting and evaluations. Simultaneously they work at a level which is open and responsive to whatever emerges from the contact with young people on a daily basis. The two dimensions can appear seamless in practice as workers strive to manage and accommodate sometimes competing priorities but the 'everyday' level is more difficult to define and measure, and as organisational priorities become more insistent the informal is open to 'colonisation' by more formal and structured agendas.

Structured agendas are part of practice, and are dominant in some organisations, particularly those which are orientated towards youth opportunity and challenge rather than social exclusion. Moreover, they can be highly successful in meeting organisational targets and outcomes as they attract young people who are already self-confident about their relationship with social institutions, who are already future orientated and are therefore able to take full advantage of the opportunities offered. Young people who had benefited from youth work in this regard value the youth facilities and can gain a great deal from them. They were articulate and reflective in their discussions with the researchers and they gave an account of the value of youth work to themselves which in itself demonstrated an important social function for youth projects.

However, the perception of youth workers is that their interventions should be relevant to a range of young people, and that different interventions and time frames are needed to deal with different
groups:

I think that young people are seasonal and I've done this work for a long, long time and you're more than likely get different young people from the summer and the winter which is great for overall targets for how many young people you're getting in but even more difficult to reach your other targets. So your recorded outcomes are good but your accredited outcomes can be quite difficult because you know you need to spend quite a few months with them young people to just get them to the stage of doing accreditation. I think

that's the side that needs reviewing...Straight away if a young person walks into this centre tonight, introduce ourselves, oh we've got these accreditations to do and this and this. And I'd just go on and bombard them or within a couple of weeks, we do get young people come through who are very confident and yeah I'm up for that. But at the same time we've got two or three who are not like that who need three or four months to work with... before they're even at a stage of standing up in a group and being quite vocal and delivering stuff.
(DD - youth worker)

Formal organisational demands for particular types of outcome inevitably gear youth projects towards working with young people who are more likely to meet those outcomes. This shapes the work which takes place within the organisation, privileges some methods over others and situates some organisations in a position to better succeed than others. Particularly disadvantaged in these conditions are local youth projects situated in areas defined by deprivation working with young people who lack alternative recreational resources and who might be defined as 'excluded'. More than this, the worker who prioritises 'the everyday' over organisational bureaucratic demands, who values service to young people over service to the organisation is likely to find their work load increasing as they struggle to meet the demands of their principles and values as well as bureaucratic demands.

3.12 Being there

Youth workers are forced in the immediate reality of their work to find ways of coping with different levels of input, with different types of young people, with different expectations from representatives of other professions, communities and institutions. In addition, they must marry what they perceive to be the competing demands of their employing organisations and the everyday expectations of young people. To deal with this involves a combination of levels of patience, humour and optimism which ultimately might be claimed to be personal rather than professional in provenance.

You have to have a really good sense of humour when for some reason you're left with two young people and you've agreed to make a buffet for 120 young people and you spend half your day going to cash and carry in your car and then you spend half the day in the kitchen buttering bread. And you think 'Did I sign up for this?'
(FG - youth worker)

When workers lack appropriate personal qualities, or when these qualities fail them for whatever reason, youth work can become painful and wearisome, resulting in an atmosphere which lacks energy. Sometimes, the absence of young people, or their failure to respond to the efforts of workers to engage them in conversation or structured programmes and activities can reflect a lack of enthusiasm amongst workers. These characteristics were evident in a minority of situations observed within the research. For example, the researchers observed workers who had become disheartened as a result of changes in direction associated with funding-led decisions to become more involved in formal partnership work in which the participation of the young people was compulsory. Removal of the voluntary element of their attendance resulted in some

young people refusing to participate in the interpersonal dialogue necessary to the success of youth work. Young people sometimes withdraw or become disruptive in such circumstances. The amount of energy required to even 'make a start' sometimes required enormous and sustained patience on the part of workers:

> *There seemed to be a series of 'small battles of will' between the young people and the workers. One young man tipped his crisps on the floor- he was asked to pick them up, at first he ignored the request, there wasn't really a big deal made, the worker found a dustpan and gave it to the young man, who then tidied up. Another young man put his rubbish in the ceiling, and was asked to remove it. One young man asked if he could put his tape on, the female worker said no as it was time to start, she then left. Another young man went behind the counter and put his tape on- but couldn't work the machine. Another worker came over and helped the young man figure out how the machine worked. The first worker returned and asked the young man to turn the tape off. He ignored her, she and the male worker repeated the request probably about ten times, each time calmly and quietly until the young man did as requested.*
> (RD)

The data consistently points to the significance of mutuality in the young person-youth worker relationship which involves personal engagement on the part of the worker as well as on the part of the young person. Put simply, if youth workers do not or cannot give of themselves, neither will the young people. 'Being there' in the broadest sense of the term – being alert and responding at an inter-personal level is equally, if not more important than being able to access resources, plan effectively and keep up-to-date records. Indeed, without the former, the latter becomes irrelevant in everyday practice.

Acknowledging the amount of energy required to 'be there' highlights the importance of there being time to not be there. Time for rest, for personal privacy and reflection are crucial in a wor situation which requires the constant use of a 'positive' self in face-to-face work. This involves a consideration of the time and space available within the working day for workers to not only create and sustain relationships, and accomplish tasks but also to think and reflect. It also raises questions about the relationship and boundaries between private time and professional time. There is some evidence that because of their personal as well as their professional commitment to improving the lives of young people, and because many of them also live in the localities of their projects, the management of private and professional time is a serious issue for workers. The following records a conversation between two youth workers:

> Fiona: *They turned up every week didn't they?*
> *Mike: They were there every week. They enjoyed it. It was something different for them to d But they were calling at my house, They called at my house Christmas morning.*

> Fiona: *We were talking about this yesterday working – where you live. Even young people having access to knowing where you live. Because we were talking about phones, your own private number, and I was thinking about this last night, you know where all your young people live, most of them. I know where most of them live because I lift them and*

leave them at home. It's about them knowing where you live and that's a bit, the line's blurred there isn't it? You can't ignore them and go, 'Get away from the door. It's Christmas morning!' or 'Get away from the door. I'm not working.' They're there for a reason.

Mike: *And I suppose that was hard for me because they were always at the door. They were always calling and calling to give me their parental consent form and I'd say, 'Give it to me next week.' Christmas morning one of the young men had left a pair of trainers at the residential and I picked them up. The residential was the start of December. So he said, 'Have you got them?' and I said, 'Yes, come and get them.' And it was Christmas morning and it was snowing and the door went and they were all standing in the snow and asked for his trainers and I gave them to him. One of them goes, 'What's wrong with you?' and I said, 'Oh I'm tired,' and then I closed the door because I think they would have stayed there a while. But they went up the street and they were doing something, and they came back and they see no problem with it.*
(DD – youth workers)

ne and space away from face to face practice, both within the workplace and with regard to ivate life, are necessary for youth workers to enable them to step back from the subjectivities everyday engagement with the unregulated features of young people's lives and to enable em to 'be there' fully when they need to communicate with the young people at their projects.

anaging the need to be flexibly available, to provide unstructured as well as structured cess and to create time for paperwork and for self-reflection, reading, pursuing information improve professional practice requires a high level of awareness, skill and self-confidence m workers. In one of the agencies which participated in the research, it was apparent that built-in' self-evaluation process, involving external researchers, was making a significant ntribution to the management of time in the workplace and to the workers' abilities to ce themselves in relation to the demands of face to face work. However, in most cases, and spite acknowledgement of the importance of non-managerial supervision in the discourses of fessional practice, workers mostly were forced to rely upon their own resources to manage competing demands of their work.

naging personal and professional time effectively is particularly difficult in environments ich are often characterised by run down facilities and limited resources. When a project is ular with young people and when it successfully involves those young people targeted in ponse to policy imperatives, there can be enormous pressure upon the use of space and upon amount of time which the worker can allocate to developing effective relationships with ng people.

tre-based workers are always involved in the management, supervision and maintenance of ldings which may or may not be fit for purpose, which may or may not be controlled by the th project, which may or may not be in suitable environments, and which may or may not be manent residences for the project. Questions of health and safety, insurance, disabled access, rity, and cleaning are nearly always part of the daily administrative load of youth workers.

My job is as a youth and community learning worker and I'm sole full time worker for the [name] project. And my roles is numerous [laughs] to say the least, cleaner, admin assistant, youth worker, manager, driver, anything and everything that comes up. And the roles kind of vary really. My role as a day time worker is that I'm the only worker in the project and I see it as split in three ways really. There's a large admin side to the project to keep the project going. That's all the evaluation forms and all the things that we need to do to monitor and record the stuff and all the money aspects. But also we hire the minibus and I have to monitor all that and keep everything up to date and all sorts so its all that stuff as well. As well as report writing etc, etc. And then the second bit is to be an advice and information worker for the day time drop-in. And that's being on hand for anybody in the community to come and use, get my expertise or if I haven't got the information then I'll refer them on to a different agency. So that's kind of individual stuff and then it's the other stuff in the day time is as a youth worker and managing groups, whether that's a residential group, whatever comes up so its about that. And then in an evening I become a detached worker manager and I manage the detached team which works Mondays to Thursdays on the streets.
(DD – project manager)

Workers are also involved in a network of relationships with other adults which are building-related. These adults might be for example, managers of a community centre, caretakers, local residents, or co-residents and they are not always sympathetic to young people's needs.

Youth workers can become 'building-bound' but usually their activity extends beyond any building which might be associated with the project. For example, they undertake visits to families, accompany young people to clinics, participate in partnership meetings, take young people on trips and stay with them in residential facilities, and of course some spend their time on detached sessions. They must be clear about their roles in different spaces if they are to be effective within them and sensitive to different expectations being prepared to explain themselves and act accordingly.

In the process of adapting and adjusting, of performing different roles in different situations, and of maintaining a constancy of presence in unpredictable situations, youth workers can become buffeted by the expectations of others. This threatens their sense of the centrality of their own personal and professional priorities and points to the importance of maintaining a professional discourse which affirms the principles and reflects the priorities in the realities of everyday practice. Availability of time and resources for workers to communicate regularly, to associate and to organise in terms which derive from practice is essential for the affirmation of professional values and principles.

3.13 Every day has meaning

Working at the level of the everyday is volatile and dynamic and is a source of creativity in youth work. However, it can also be mundane and ordinary, subject to marginality or invisibility. Seldom are everyday informal interventions perceived as an outcome or a success story.

Sometimes they are not even perceived as particularly interesting. In this sense, they cannot be evaluated and they do not become the stuff of narratives explaining the youth work in the same way as the extraordinary. The ordinary cannot be evaluated like the extraordinary.

In the apparently unremarkable world of the everyday there is significant value and meaning to youth workers, young people, and their communities from 'the youth work process'. Meaningful youth work practice does not end when a target has been reached – or missed, or when a formal structured session has ended and everyone has appeared to switch off. The everyday of youth work is as much – if not more – of a location of meaning-making, boundary setting and development through listening and dialogue, as are those more readily defined aspects of youth work that attract and respond to formal scrutiny.

Chapter 4:

Communicating and Performing

The female worker said she had been thinking about what the young people said last night about they would be causing trouble if they weren't involved in the project. She said she didn't think this would be the case, but that this is what they think people expect them to say.
(RD)

4.1 The language of youth workers

The field of practice for youth work comprises a series of cross-cutting and different levels of communication and meaning-making. This depends upon the environment and context, the different methods and objectives involved in any given part of a youth work programme and the inter-relationships and purposes of the different groups and individuals who participate in the process. Everyday language is inevitably different from discussion about practice. In the everyday, conversation is immediate with regard to relationships, tasks, questions, explanations and circumstances. In discussion about the meaning of youth work, language is more systematically reflective, shaped by a set of mutually understood concepts regarding what participants think youth work ought to be about and what they think is expected of them in any given situation, as well as by the realities experienced. For youth workers, such reflective discussion is also shaped by a professional discourse which privileges certain concepts which are part of an everyday professional language whose meanings are assumed amongst workers. The self-consciousness of discussion which is intended to communicate the meaning of youth work in a general sense is more 'performative' than the language of everyday practice because those involved in the discussion are more aware of purpose and audience.

The presence of a researcher inevitably has an effect upon the language used. Insofar as the researcher is perceived as an 'outsider' or an audience with a particular agenda, then it can make communication at any level more of a performance. This effect is apparent to some extent in the data. For example, it was explicit when youth workers expressed anxiety about whether the researchers were 'getting what they wanted' from the project, when one group of young people 'acted up' with a youth worker who seemed to be trying to perform for the researcher, and when young people diverted discussions with the researchers by playing around with the microphone . However, what is more remarkable is the extent to which youth workers and young people seemed undisturbed by the participation of the researchers and how quickly the researcher presence was incorporated in projects. This to some extent was dependent upon the fieldwork

skills of the researcher, but it also suggests an intrinsic ease of communication between different types of people present for different reasons within youth projects and a familiarity in dealing with outsiders. The sociability of youth projects is perhaps part of their everyday attractiveness to young people. Projects were found to be welcoming places; workers were friendly and open; and once they had been introduced to the researchers, the young people simply accepted their presence as a legitimate part of the life of the project.

Similarly, in the focus groups and the directed data collection, ideas and reflections were offered freely by the workers who took part. Talk seems to come readily to most youth workers and the fluidity of the discussions about practice and its meanings suggest that most of them are involved in a continuous process of reflection, dialogue and information-sharing about the work. There is an underlying unanimity and conceptual clarity across different locations and types of agency that youth work should be characterised as informal, educational and developmental. In practice this demands an holistic approach to young people which involves building relationships on a voluntary basis.

Interviewer: *What do you think is the main purpose of youth work?...*

Linda: *For me on a personal level, not taking into account the principles of youth work set by policy, it is working with young people where they're at, giving them the information and support they need or require or want, request, but they're determining what they need in order then to progress. Making informed choices*

Marie: *Its informal education when it comes down to it. And as Linda said it's about giving young people information to make informed choices and using many different methods as a medium in order to do that so anything can be a method of education.*
(FG – youth workers)

Interviewer: *Well what is distinctive about youth work? How would you describe it?*

Ray: *I think one of the most important things is the voluntary participation with young people. They come because they want to come. I think that's one of the most important things for us. Anything which we organise and we do usually in consultation with them is voluntary.*
(FG – youth workers)

Interviewer: *Do you think that there's anything distinctive about youth work that makes it different?*

Fred: *I think the fundamental one is that young people choose to do it and they don't need to come near any of us*

John: *We aren't forced on them like a social worker can be. And in some cases we're not as fully structured as what school would be. So it's a young person's choice to approach us rather than us approach them.*
(FG – youth workers)

Workers also consistently pointed to a growing unease with conditions of change. Here their conceptual language seemed to falter suggesting that they do not fully comprehend the changes. For example:

> *With the change of youth work across the ten years that I've seen it, I mean it is massive. It's not what it was anywhere near ten years ago. So many things have changed. And so many of the things that we were working towards back then has come back on line as policy, and has been written up with loads of jargonistic terms and stuff. But it's basically, it's very, very basic, but now the funding's not in place in a core way for us to be carrying out all the work. And it is being pigeon- holed into anti-social behaviour stuff, or into this or the next thing. So it's all issue based, but there's a thread through all of it and you need to be able to have the infrastructure there to address that.*
> (FG – youth workers.)

Whilst it could be argued that in the setting of a discussion amongst co-professionals it is always likely that the dominant concepts of the professional discourse will come to the fore and that therefore a certain amount of conformity is probable, the data which emerged from other parts of the research suggested that these views were characteristic of youth work practitioners in their individual work environment and were incorporated in their practical approach. Indeed, there are no examples to be found in the data where a different view prevails. The expressions of their beliefs were therefore more than a performance but inscribed within the communication involved in their everyday practice.

4.2 The language of young people

Many of the young people who participated in group discussions as part of the research were able to describe in detail and very positively the significance of their contact with youth projects. Obviously, they did not use the same conceptual language as workers, but it was clear that they deeply appreciated the opportunity to have some say in the agenda, to meet other young people socially and to pursue interests in a way which was not available elsewhere:

> Interviewer: *So how would you say that coming here is different from other things, like school?...*
>
> Craig: *It's really different, because it's really laid back and relaxed. It's more about what we would want to do and things we enjoy doing. Like I absolutely adore skating and since we came here it's all been centred about that, and it's been what we want to do in the skating. It's just been thoroughly enjoyable from the start, like 2 1/2 years and I haven't been annoyed once; I've never come out of this place angry. It's always been a cheerful mood and I can't wait until next week.*
> (FG – young people).
>
> Interviewer: *What do you think that youth workers do?*

Ian: *Oh they're brilliant, well ours is anyway*
(laughter)

Interviewer: *What makes them brilliant?*

Ian: *They don't slaver*

Interviewer: *They don't what? I don't know what that means.*

Dave: *Slaver, talk about you, call you names.*

Dave: *They let you do any, well not anything you want, but, they gave us bikes. They took us out places, and they let us do two weeks of our own choice. Where we get to choose what we want to do.*
(FG - young people)

Interviewer: *So even though it's in school do you think that there are differences between the youth workers and the teachers?*

Lucy: *Yeah definitely because I think the youth workers are more, like you find with the teachers they're making you realise your potential academically and they're trying to bring out the best in you for grades, whereas youth workers are trying to bring out, like make you realize your self-worth and your potential but not just for your academic side, it's about you as a person. And I know from my point of view I think in a way every time you meet with them you always come away feeling good about yourself. You feel good that you've worked with them just because, they don't necessarily have to tell you, ' Oh I've really enjoyed working with you today,' but the just whole atmosphere of the group makes you come away feeling good and that you can succeed.*
(FG - young people)

Kim: *You are doing it because you want to not because you are being made to*

Laura: And it's more, you get to do things because you want to do them instead of -

Zoë: *You get more of a say*

Kim: *You get to choose*
(FG - young people)

Most important to the young people who made such comments were clearly the positive experiences which contact with youth workers engendered. This was related to their voluntary participation, the power of choice offered them and the personal regard given to them. What was crucial was that the workers 'actually seem to genuinely care' and that contact with youth work made them 'feel good.'

Some of the young people who had long term involvement with youth projects were also sensitive to the changes which had taken place in recent years. One in particular was vocal about the negative consequences of this. She used the focus group discussion, when a worker was present, and knowing that the discussion was being recorded, as an opportunity to air her discontent with the new situation. The research was for her a possible vehicle for taking her concerns into a wider field complaining bitterly about: 'Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, computers, paperwork' and demanding that her concerns be fed back via the research to 'the big bosses'. However, discontent with changes in youth work agendas was not necessarily expressed performatively as in this case and not always with any self-consciousness of the researcher's presence. The following diary entry records an encounter as the workers and researcher were returning from a detached session:

> *There were three young men on the street asking if the project was open as we walked back for the girls group. The worker said that it wasn't and they started to mimic her saying 'I've got a meeting'. They said that that's all the worker ever says to them and they were never allowed in. The worker said afterwards that they had tried to do some work with them over the summer but they hadn't brought consent forms back. They do not really just let young people into the project, that's not really what it's about.*
> (RD)

In projects with a history of generic youth work, some young people who might previously have access to recreational facilities and youth work attention without the burden of organisational demands, resent new regimes. Notably, the young woman who complained about paperwork, also complained about a shift to problem-orientated work:

> *'What if you want to talk about the happy things, rather than people getting battered and bullied?'*
> (FG)

The demand for happiness is perhaps legitimate amongst young people and insofar as it is related to good health, a good argument could be made that there is a role for youth work in this regard. How this is legitimated in public organisations with expenditure limits is a matter of priorities.

The group discussions with young people in the research gave most of them an opportunity to talk about 'the happy things' which they associated with youth work. Mostly this was associated with extraordinary, rather than ordinary experiences. They had found in youth projects something which they had not expected in their everyday lives – a chance to play music, to walk to a local waterfall, to act as mentors, to go abroad or to influence council policy on providing skate-parks. All these things were highly valued by them. However, they did not all speak in the same way. Their approach to the researcher presence and to the recorder was highly sensitive to their peers and to how far they felt the need to perform. Sometimes their responses to questions took the form of banter and joking, but even here significant points were made:

> Researcher: *What kind of things do you get out of coming to a project like this?*

Pete: *Out from the cold*

Wayne: *Relationships*
(Laughter)

Pete: *It's the truth!*

Researcher: *So if this wasn't here what would you have to do instead?*

Jess: *Sit at home*

Pete: *Be cold*
(Laughter and joking)

Wayne: *Internet I don't have that at home so I use that, snooker, I don't have a snooker table in my room so use that. I don't have like fifty friends in my house.*
(DD – young people)

Other young people responded to direct discussion and the tape recorder with a level of shyness not witnessed in their everyday association in the project. They still conveyed something of the worth of the work to them but here the data loses something of its 'richness':

Researcher: *Why do you come to the project?*

Rosie: *Why? Because I like it.*

Researcher: *What do you like about it?*

Rosie: *I like working with Cathy and Marian (workers) and everyone*

Researcher: *So you like the workers?*

Rosie: *Yes*

Researcher: *OK. Is there anything else that makes you come to the project?*

Rosie: *I like to take part in everything...*
Researcher: *So what kinds of things do you do when you come to the project? I've seen you do some stuff but not all of it.*

Rosie: *We do all sorts. Like, – play snooker and everything and all different games and that (Interruption)*

Rosie: *All different games, we play snooker and like hang man and everything and it's good as well*

Researcher: *And what else do you do?*

Rosie: *Err... I don't know*

Researcher: *You do computer stuff don't you?*

Rosie: *Yes computer stuff and everything*

Researcher: *What do you think you get out of coming here?*

Rosie: *What's that mean?*

Researcher: *Like do you think it changes you, or do you think you learn things or do you get nothing out of it?*

Rosie: *I learn things, I learn a lot.*
(DD – young person)

4.3 Communicating in practice

Making sense of the different types of communication recorded in the research is similar to the interpretive process of sense-making undertaken by youth workers in their everyday practice. The youth worker, like the researcher is not faced with a blank sheet upon which individuals make discrete and meaningful comments, but rather, people perform according to expectations, pre-conceived ideas and whoever else is present. Communication is relational. To engage in an educational process with young people, youth workers must read the meaning below the surface of verbal language. Indeed, quite often, they must ignore the content of the language – which might seem to say very little, or might be an expression of bravado, a performance, as much as a conversation where the meanings are obviously present. They must do this not only in order to establish effective relations with young people, but also to make interventions which might enable those young people to grow and change. Sometimes this means puncturing the performance:

> *But sometimes it's about them feeling confident about how they express themselves to another adult. Sometimes they might not express themselves correctly to us, but they don't get that immediate reaction back. You kind of sit down and say, 'What are you trying to say?' Or 'Is there another way of saying it?' And it's good if they can use that because there are certain times when they need to approach an adult in a different way than kind of confrontational. If they can work on that, certainly...we get a lot of that, where if they are really fed up and have had a bad day, they've had a bad session. If they can get over the initial 'F off!' and on to the rest of it, then hopefully at the end of [the scheme] you would hope that they have got a strategy in place for getting the first bit out of the way so that they can achieve what they want to achieve.*
> (DD – youth worker)

It's about looking behind things and seeing what's behind the shop front window, the centre door or whatever, and that's important, really important. We were just talking about it the other night with Danny. And how, I told him he goes out at night time and he puts his clown make-up on, but if you really sit down and talk to him that's when he takes the mask off and he sits and talks. And it happened at the end of the discussion. After about an hour the group came in and he just went straight back into his clown mask again, and he said it, he realised. And the best thing about that night was he said 'I've done it again,' to me. And that was excellent, and that cheers me up, things like that. It makes a dull day with my meetings and everything and I go home tired but I say, 'Yeah there's something that's happened.'
(DD – project manager)

When youth workers speak amongst themselves, much of the meaning is on the surface. Levels of interpretative alertness are not required as communication tends to proceed from a shared understanding about the terms of reference:

Claire: *They can come in and they make the choices. It's their time, they make up their mind what it is they do in that time*

Ed: *It also allows the young people as participants to decide the outcome of the project that they are involved with rather than have everything developed as a curriculum and set -*

Louise: *Totally, which can be quite massive because if the rest of their life they feel they're out of control.*
(FG – youth workers)

Such implicit understanding includes an acknowledgement of the principles of voluntarism and young person-centredness, of the educational approach and the difficulties of bureaucracy and for clarification, it frequently also involves comparison with social workers and teachers.

4.4 Defining youth work

The tendency to designate youth workers as 'not social workers' and 'not teachers' is a positive definition insofar as it makes youth work more attractive to young people who identify with it because of its difference. However, it implies a problem if youth work is required to become more like teaching or social work. Ironically, insofar as youth workers inhabit such a negative professional identity, they increase their vulnerability to incorporation as a 'marginal' profession. The consequences of this were expressed in the data. Because of their 'in-between' or 'marginal' location in a network of services, youth workers fear they are being transformed by contemporary policy into pseudo- or supplementary social workers and teachers. This is an area of uncertainty in their discussions:

Jim: *I think the point that [we are] raising is that there is a culture of us taking money for anything, and I'm scared that...we are going the way of Connexions, in England, where we become something other than youth workers, we start to look like ...*

Kay: *Social services*

Kerry: *But then that's up to the staff to not let that happen*

Frank: *And not accept that*

Kay: *To find the balance, like we were on about, finding ..the money but being able to do the quality youth work, that we want to do*

Sharon: *But it is extremely hard though.*
(FG – youth workers)

The contradiction in this negative designation for youth workers is related to other contradictions. So just as dealing with the marginality of young people and being marginal in relation to other services is at the centre of the work, so too is the formal approach of youth workers informal. It is not the educational aspect of their approach which is difficult to relate, but its informality. Related to this, if to be meaningful the work has to be responsive to the unpredictable, then the main content of the work cannot be identified before it is brought to attention in practice. This suggests a particular set of difficulties for the status, visibility and naming of the reality of youth practice:

John: *The hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life is describe what I do for a living. It's really difficult. It's easier to say what you don't do and what you try not to do because there's the assumption you play table tennis or pool or you work with the bad lads. That's what people automatically assume that you work with and that's what you do.*

Researcher: *A lot of people have said it can be difficult to explain what they do and how it's about explaining what it isn't not what it is*

John: *Exactly. And it is a lot easier. They say, 'So do you do this?' 'Well, we can do.' 'Well you either do it or you don't?' 'Well, no it's based on the individual or the group.' And, 'Oh, right. So if my such and such wanted to come in and do this, yeah, you do it? But isn't that what social workers do?' 'Well they do, but they just do that. But we do that, and that and that, and that.' 'Oh, right' – (mobile phone interruption).*
(DD – project manager)

This struggle suggests that the publicly accepted discourse of professional practice is not adequate to youth work's reality. To focus upon the 'informal' of 'informal education' for instance allows for an ever-changing kaleidoscope of possibility which is in tension with the objective, linear and structured approach of educational 'programmes'. So youth workers find themselves organising educational programmes to meet requirements for shape and form in public communication, to gain legitimacy as educational professionals, and then attempt to build informality into these programmes. Meanwhile another aspect of their work continues but with little public voice. This is the informality which comes from the interpersonal friendliness, the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of young peoples' needs for space, time and recreation

in their own terms and the openness and flexibility upon which education through dialogue can proceed. There are therefore always elements of professional discourse which are performative insofar as they respond to what is required for funding or for legitimacy within policy. However, there are other elements which are repressed or silenced and which yet reflect a significant part of the realities of everyday life in youth projects.

4.5 Purpose

Youth projects are a three dimensional canvas which a range of different people enter and leave, upon which they communicate at different levels, simultaneously as well as separately. The communication involves a range of different media – not only the voice, but also silence, body language, letters and notes, games and the organisation of the environment. This is then interpreted and developed by participants according to their information, knowledge and experience.

The task of the youth worker resembles that of the researcher insofar as the youth worker too uses their subjective perspective to make sense of the encounters in everyday practice. Whilst theories and information from the objective world enable youth workers to explain what they witness and experience, this cannot be divorced from the position which they inhabit as workers, and from their personal understanding of the relations of practice. This will always bear the imprint of their own ideas about purpose, about what motivates them and about what youth work means to them. This might include such intangibles as 'love' or 'care' or 'concern' or 'belief'.

> *It's giving them that sort of, love's probably the wrong word to use these days right, because its taken far too much out of context, but they do get to an extent. One of the main things folk need, and it isn't just young folk it's everybody, they need that certain extent of love and somebody that's really caring for them.*
> (FG – youth worker)

Here the youth work response differs from research. Except for purposes of evaluation, its purpose is not to 'capture data' but to change people. Youth workers are attempting to organise the cacophony and the barrage of signals into some sort of pattern and to pick out meaning from the 'noise' in order to act and intervene appropriately and in the interests of the other person. These acts of organisation and meaning-making occur at every level of practice. They include efforts to affect the environment in which youth work takes place which involves concern for the facilities, building and use of space in the project. They are inscribed in the development of programmes and timetables. They are intrinsic to the informal and formal face to face communication with a range of different young people. And they are given particular inflections in communication with the public, with particular reference to representative adults who occupy different roles and powers in relation to youth work practice. The following four chapters will consider in more detail the messages which are articulated in relation to each of these four areas of meaning-making.

Chapter 5:

Communicating Through Facilities, Buildings and Space

The project is based in an old shop. There are two rooms, both a bit battered. There is a pool table in the front room and an old sofa in the back room along side a small sink/ fridge.
(RD)

5.1 Places to be

In and of themselves the facilities which are available for youth work and the resource environment in which it is practised carry meanings which communicate value and expectations. The availability of buildings and of resources for activities confirms and reinforces the dominant meaning ascribed to youth projects as 'places to go' with 'things to do' (DfES, 2005). However, for young people, they are also places 'to be':

> *There's nothing for younger children and teenagers. It's like, 'The teenagers are going to hang around the streets anyway.' No we're not! Why would we want to hang around the streets? There's nothing else for us to do, you know what I mean? People say 'Why do teenagers hang around on street corners?' But where else do you want us to go? You give me a nice warm room and I'll go and sit in it (laughter) rather than sat on the corner, but if it's not there? I'm lucky enough I can have friends come up to my house, but there are a lot of people have a lot of younger brothers and sisters and their mother and father don't want people hanging around their house. So they've nowhere. There's nothing organised. There's nothing. In Broomhill where I'm from, there's nothing, there's a community centre that's open one day a week, for a mother and toddlers group. And that's great for mothers and toddlers but what about teenagers?*
> (DD – young woman)

The buildings in which youth work takes place are first and foremost safe associational and recreational spaces whose meanings are set against the other spaces which young people inhabit – mainly street, home and school. In the context of these other places, youth projects are rated highly and valued by the young people who use them. So for instance, a place for young mothers to meet which offers them a crèche as well as opportunities to create and play themselves adds a positive dimension to their lives. They might otherwise be isolated, alone in

their homes with their children:

Marybeth: *There are things in my living room have been made from here, mirrors and things.*

Shelly: *We also did a photography class. You know all the children, we took them up the field and there were nice photos of them, really good.*

Fi: *Black and white.*

Shelly: We developed them as well, in a dark room and everything.
Researcher: *Could you give us an example of something that has been important to you while you've been coming here...?*

Shelly: *Just that it lets you, you can do things for yourself as well.*

Marybeth: *I've become more confident, kind of thing, like I feel more like I can just ... (talking together)*

Fi: *It's funny because we all live in the same area, but we never really knew each other, did we? I used to walk past Shelly on the street and never even speak to her, and now we're really good pals. And we've just made heaps of pals through here, and our kids love it, and they've got heaps of friends as well*

Marybeth: *My kid's like 'Can I go to my nursery, can I go to my nursery?' and I'm like, 'It's not nursery.' Because her brother goes to the nursery, so she thinks this is her nursery, because she's got all her friends, because she's getting toilet trained because she saw all the big kids using their potties. So she's learning something and I'm learning something in the same respect, you know?*

Shelly: *We get to do a lot of stuff that we couldn't have done, being young mums. Like, photography course and going to London and stuff. We got to do all that.*
(DD - young mothers)

The meaning for the young people in the use of such resources is the pleasure which can be derived from the friendship and the activity. Even though they understand that they and their children are also 'learning,' this is a consequence of the participation, not its primary purpose for them.

Youth workers are self-conscious about the importance of the space which youth facilities offer to young people in terms of relaxing as well as developing:

If you look at a lot of the areas we work in, people come from difficult family backgrounds and don't have a lot of support and don't particularly want to be in the house all the time. School is a chore and is as regimented maybe as the family environment. The only real other outlet that young people would tend to have socially would be to go down to

the club for a few hours... Sometimes a young person has had a really crap day and gone home and had a really crap evening and they don't actually want to go out at half seven and necessarily want to start doing a programme. Sometimes they want to just sit down and play a game of pool, and chat to their mates and maybe put a play station on. And it's maybe something they can't do at home...And not just people who come from disadvantage or marginalised young people it's the same across the board. Young people need their space, they get very frustrated either within their own house or street or even the community and the opportunity to be able to be your own person for a couple of hours somewhere else and chill out and meet people and find your own. So it really is important and I think the youth worker creates that space and makes it comfortable.
(DD - youth worker)

5.2 Youth worker responsibilities

The question of facilities is a recurrent theme in the everyday world of youth workers. They are responsible for raising and allocating funds; for consulting about new buildings or adapting and maintaining old ones; they must choose and order specialist equipment and identify, book and pay rent for suitable accommodation for specialist activities and residential trips; and they must ensure that insurance, health and safety, security and disability access standards and procedures are met. And they must often do this simultaneously with other work:

[Sessional workers] have got fifteen minutes. And that's not fifteen minutes to do the evaluation. That's fifteen minutes to clean and tidy the building after a session, secure the building, and I mean a building the size of this, you've got to go outside and put all the locks on, check each room and make sure nobody's in and things aren't switched on. So it leaves one person to do the evaluation, doesn't put the quality in, they just read it out, has anybody got anything else to add? And at this point they're over their hours and they just want to go home and they do.
(DD - youth worker)

Sometimes buildings are experienced simply as a chore:

One of the most difficult things I have to do is try to manage a building. It takes up a lot of my time and that's not youth work. Yeah I've got to accept it as part of the job, young people use the building so it has to be safe but I think that's a job for somebody else to do
(DD - youth worker)

The balance of concern for buildings and equipment changes in relation to location and methods, but all workers, whether building-based, detached or peripatetic have to manage facilities at some level. Simply securing a suitable place in which to undertake the work can be a time-consuming task:

The organisation seems to have a number of venues in which it delivers the work, some they own (although these seem to tend to be offices -with some delivery space). Other venues are

owned by communities or other organisations (the organisation may enter deals to access this- the youth forum lends them a room in the city centre- but they have equipped this with a computer suite in return). This can mean it is a nightmare to organise things. Before we met with the peer researchers the worker phoned round the young people to see who was available, based on this she selected a venue closest to those who could attend- phoning to see if this was available, then phoning young people back with travel arrangements - then driving for an hour to pick them up and another hour at the end to drop them off.
(RD)

In such situations, youth workers have very little control over the quality and presentation of the buildings and facilities which they use. The important thing which they communicate is that they are prepared to make the effort to secure their use for young people. This is a particularly significant message when the use of community buildings by the young is so often restricted and contested:

Jenna: *But in Oakside there is a good few events and stuff happens in the community centre, but there's not an awful lot for young people.*

Thérèsa: *There's not enough for young people.*

Bella: *There's an awful lot of concerts and different stuff, but a lot of them are aimed at the older groups.*

Thérèsa: *Like there is a drama thing coming up over the summer, but it's for adults. There's no children involved in it.*

Bella: *And the area is well known for its drama- why not involve young people, you know...?*
(DD - young people)

As it was getting towards lunch time a couple of young men came into the centre. The centre manager was a bit abrupt with them and told them that they couldn't stay if they'd just come for free food, if they'd wanted to be part of the day they should have got out of bed earlier... Over lunch other people seemed to come and go [they seemed to be friends, relatives of the people who worked at the community centre]... One of the workers ...was talking about the way the community centre manager had reacted to the young men who came earlier. He was not happy that she had made them leave. He said, 'What impression is that giving out to them? "We don't want your sort around here, your face doesn't fit," type of thing.'
(RD)

Negotiating the use of public buildings is an important part of the advocacy role performed by youth workers. This demands that they establish reasonable working relationships with community representatives who exercise proprietorial power over local resources and who might be unsympathetic to youth. Once access has been gained, youth workers then take responsibility for the behaviour of the young people, sometimes maintaining their determination to continue to use the facilities in the teeth of opposition:

The community centre ... has a modern feel. The worker...talked about how she has to carry all of her paperwork with her as previously some had gone missing from the centre. She also talked about how she has to ask for her money tin. There are obviously some issues between her and the staff at the centre, which is mainly run by people who also live in the village. She suggested that this can make you feel like an 'outsider'...She said that the young people in this village do need something and that is why she continues to work there...It is a new centre which could be used a lot, [but] it isn't open access for people in the community and is tightly managed.
(RD).

5.3 The quality of buildings

Given the amount of time and energy spent handling issues related to multi-use buildings over which youth workers and young people have little control, it is hardly surprising that they prefer to inhabit designated space. Yet even here, some facilities can be problematic. Despite the ideal of a comfortable, accessible, safe place where young people can relax as well as learn in the presence of friendly sympathetic adults, the reality is sometimes very different from this. Youth facilities can quickly take on a worn and shabby look from their constant use by numerous exuberant, physically expressive and sometimes aggressive and destructive young people. Moreover, when the energy or morale of youth work staff is low, or when projects are understaffed, the fabric and décor of buildings usually reflects this. Youth provision has endured a diminishing and re-prioritised resource base since the mid 1970s and this has had a detrimental effect upon the physical condition of many facilities. Institutional poverty is manifest in their quality and condition:

Researcher: *Is there anything you don't like about coming here or anything that goes on here?*

Young person: *The building itself, it looks like its going to fall down*
(DD)

The project manager reflected on others' first impressions of the place. The back room has a very low ceiling and many of the ceiling tiles are broken, missing or discoloured, due to a combination of a leaky roof and young people being able to easily reach the ceiling and damage the tiles. He commented on the image this shows to other professionals and young people who come to look round, 'It's a bit embarrassing really.' The worker felt that there were possible pots of money to sort it out, but they are hoping to extend the building again (they have identified possible funders for this) and don't see the point in repairing it only to replace it.
(RD)

The workers then later wondered if they were trying to access a prostitution support service that is also based in the building.
(RD)

The condition of facilities and the terms under which they are used for youth work suggest an

underlying lack of public regard for young people and signify the very small amount of power which their advocates have over the allocation and use of local resources. Often workers attempt to neutralise these negative messages by working on the fabric and décor of buildings, and by thinking carefully about how space might best be used:

> *The manager gave me a tour of the building. There was a group of young people playing football in the sports hall and some young people sitting in a 'chill out' room. The manager does have plans for rejuvenating the building to try and utilise some of the spaces better.*
> (RD)

> *Everyone at the project builds a portfolio of achievement around personal development and accredited learning through programmes. They do literacy and numeracy work and the project aims to give the young women a positive experience of public exams by the sitting room becoming the exam hall. At Christmas they hang the clock from the Christmas tree, and the workers are the teachers and invigilators. This demystifies the experience for the young women.*
> (RD)

Not all facilities used by youth projects are shabby and some workers have been successful in gaining specialist funds for new buildings and for refurbishment of old ones. Two of the projects in the sample were in the process of moving during the period of the research. Although such movement was unsettling and could disrupt the continuity of the work, workers were generally optimistic that newer premises would improve the quality of their work. In one of these projects the young people were 'eager for the new building and the promised facilities,' but they 'were sceptical of when this would materialise' (RD).

Although there is clearly a need for more suitable and better quality provision for many projects, not all the newer, smarter buildings encountered in the research process were unproblematic. The messages which some communicated were not primarily about relaxation and recreation:

> *This was my first visit to this project. The centre lies at the end of a village high street. The exterior and interior of the building are clean and modern. There was no evidence of a space for young people to lounge in, or use as a social area. The reception area is open plan with workers' desks off to the left. In an area to the right are information notice-boards, photo displays (featuring a [local] FC footballer giving out awards to young people) and sofas. The space looks and feels more like a waiting area than a relaxed informal area. Upstairs was the boardroom, with large oval table – at which the interview took place.*
> (RD)

The organisation of some facilities emphasises the shift in priorities towards more structured interventions as a response to policy and funding streams. 'Waiting rooms,' open plan offices, board rooms, information boards and displays communicate that the priority use of the building is 'business' and that the use of space is controlled by the needs of workers vis a vis their organisation. The implicit message is that the project is used by young people in pre-determined ways and only under conditions set elsewhere. This type of message is also apparent in the

security measures which some projects adopt. Measures adopted because of safety issues can present an unwelcoming façade and suggest to young people that workers expect the building to be misused. Tension around access is not uncommon as workers attempt to manage buildings which might be the only youth identified facility in the area and at the same time prioritise certain types of work, create time and space for administration and run specialist sessions with identified groups.

5.4 Using space to communicate

Whatever the nature of the environment in which youth projects are to be found, it communicates something to staff, young people and other visitors about the ethos of the project. This is reinforced by the ways in which youth workers negotiate with young people around expectations and boundaries with regard to the use of the facilities, in itself an educational process. Learning to respect collectively used resources is linked with other aspects of youth work including the development of self-awareness and consideration for other people:

> *Like a few of the girls didn't respect me when they first came, and you sort of you got the feeling thought it was like being back to school, they wouldn't tidy up after them so you were constantly saying, 'Look respect it. You're using the facilities, could you please tidy up after yourselves?' And then you were getting a bit of a 'Hmm, it's like being back at school,' but once you build up the trust with them then, I would be saying to them, 'This is not being at school, this is your time. If you were at home and you were doing something you wouldn't leave it in a mess, you would respect it and tidy it up after you. And if someone came into your home, you would want them to keep it tidy.' So I picked up on that a lot. Because there was a few of the girls who just used it basically like a doss place, to sit, get their tea, and get as much out of it as they could but wouldn't help, tidy up or things like that. That's some of the moments I've seen that has improved a lot in attitude, in the way they talk to some people. The swearing; a few of them had really foul language for a while. And I was like, 'No, I'm not here to listen to this. You want to do that go back outside, but not in the building.' And they do, they respect you now for it. Some of them still slip up, but they do they respect you a lot more.*
> (DD – young mothers' worker)

> Liz: *It also depends on the physical fabric of the building because the youth project, even this, there's a certain amount of ownership. There's nobody else in, there's no pensioners, mothers and toddlers. Ultimately that's what you'd hope would happen, share and share alike but with vulnerable and young folk at risk we've found that the youth project has a great deal of success because it was theirs, so if they destroy it it's theirs. We didn't have a lot of destruction – there's always one or two- but at least you can say if you destroy that, other groups will complain, it was about 'This is your own stuff,' and the peer group pressure came in there, that worked quite a lot. Even theft of musical instruments, the last place we had was a portakabin, the windows just needed to be pushed in and they could be away with all the electric guitars. Now that only happened once in twelve years that somebody stole something and everybody knew it was there, but they'd be depriving themselves. So you're at a disadvantage in that building up there because it's shared and it's not purposeful*

Ian: *And you can't introduce new things because pillars obscure. What you want is an open space...*
(DD – youth workers)

In order to encourage a sense of ownership and belonging, and also to stimulate discussion and debate, youth projects frequently use display boards, photographs and exhibitions representing issues relevant to the young people, work which they have produced, or photographs of them in the context of the project:

The session runs in the basement of a community centre, relatively newly done out, equipped with pool table, DJ decks, kitchen, seating area. There was a lot of art work on the walls, looking like it was done by young people. There was a consultation about getting a youth shelter on the wall, which young people were looking at and talking about. There were examples of the kinds of shelter you could get and questions about where they would like it located.
(RD)

Where it was not possible to mount displays, it was seen as a significant failing of the facility by both youth workers and young people:

The environment is clean and modern, and has access to kitchen facilities, but it is not particularly suitable for a group to meet in. There is little equipment of interest to young people such as a pool table or drinks machine. There is a CD player and a small TV/VCR. It is not possible to put up posters and artwork on the walls. However display boards have been provided, which are put away at the end of each session.
(DD – youth worker)

Researcher: *What would you want to see in a new youth project?*

Sam: *A room! We used to have a room of our own, but they took that off us. It was our own. Here it's not so good. They let us put our stuff up, but it's got to come down at the end of the night.*
(DD – young person).

In one project, the business-like environment had been modified to some extent with the use of displays involving young people. Notably, one of the groups involved in the display had named themselves 'The Charvers':

On the landing of the upstairs area were several photo displays related to various youth activities – including a sea fishing and horse riding trip. The group name that the young people had adopted for this activity, as evidenced by a banner title through the display, was 'The Charvers'... There were also stage drama images and materials from the long-running domestic violence project.
(RD)

Claiming ownership of a label associated in the media with anti-social behaviour and disaffection is one way in which young people can assert their right to think differently or to dissent from prevailing orthodoxy. In this case though, the position could not be sustained in the face of a visit from the Prime Minister to the project:

> *Whilst still on the spacious landing area of the first floor, I noticed that the photo display board that previously proclaimed 'The Charvers' was gone. It also looked as though alternative banners had been placed across the display.*
>
> *As I was about to leave ...I enquired as to what had happened to 'The Charvers' banner.*
>
> *'Tony Blair's people made us change it' Rhonda said ... Tony Blair visited us last Friday – all week we had all kinds of different people in – checking over the building, briefing us all, sniffer dogs – the works.'*
> (RD)

The messages and meanings contained in the photographic display were clearly politically sensitive in a way which had not been anticipated by the youth workers involved. Even if the young people had adopted this group name only as a sign of sub-cultural identity, which other diary notes about their preferred clothing style suggest was the case, other meanings with political sensitivities are more powerful and undermine the affirmative identity adopted by the young people in their engagement with the youth project. The youth workers had not offered any resistance to the demand to cover the banner title- other concerns about the validity and political recognition of the project were more dominant. Whilst the concerns to be politically endorsed are legitimate, the exercise of power in this case signifies quite clearly that centring young people is not at the heart of the political agenda and is not expected to be at the heart of the youth work agenda either. In this process, the realities of the everyday in youth work are silenced for a public image which is distorted. This is but one particularly acute example of the ways in which the language and meanings of youth work written in the background and context of the work can be read in ways which might not be intended.

In some ways, the messages communicated through buildings and facilities and the use of space are accidental in the everyday language of youth work. In other ways they are consciously created by those who have some power and control over resources for young people. In what ever way they emerge into the environment in which youth work is practised, they carry with them meanings which are constantly present. The environment offers opportunities and limits for prioritising particular approaches to the work, it demands time and attention and it is worked upon, shaped and fought over in the everyday. As it emerges in the research data, the environment of practice contributes to the unstable and contested nature of the language of youth work.

Chapter 6:

Communicating Through Programmes and Timetables

I think if you take the example of the bush-craft week, that wasn't about teaching them about chopping wood and making things out of wood, what was important were the transferable skills – the stuff about communication, about confidence, about working as a team.
(FG – project manager)

6.1 'Things to do'

Programmes and timetables are partly shaped by resources and the space available. They are also a reference point for identifying the interests of youth workers and young people. On top of this, they reflect the priorities of the project managers and sponsoring agencies and the way in which the project interprets its response to national and organisational policy. In this sense they offer a structured framework within which all interests in youth projects are negotiated, pursued and represented.

Whatever actually happens within programmes, their language is mainly that of 'activity'. A session may be described in a timetable as 'drop-in' but it is implicit that there will be activity on offer, for games, arts and crafts and the ubiquitous pool table have come to represent the relaxing, recreational features of youth work. Only in detached youth work is a session likely to be lacking activity content, being represented as 'making contact' or 'creating relationships' and even here, the outcome of the intervention is often characterised as purposeful activity. So even though young people might be simply meeting together on the streets, or visiting a project building in order to associate comfortably, and even though this is considered legitimate by youth workers, projects always offer 'things to do.'

Youth workers look for opportunities for the purposeful development of their practice with young people in the spheres of both 'being' and 'doing' but it is 'doing' which most often dominates as a convenient descriptor of practice. So for example, at the first visit to one of the projects, the researcher recorded the characteristics of the project provided in her meeting with the manager:

The project delivers one-to-one work, drop-in during break and lunch times and also runs after school activities. They run a multicultural arts group which aims to give the young people the opportunity to get involved in various things around the city and to learn more about their own and other cultures. They arrange trips to the theatre and also work towards the carnival in the city. The group aims to explore the young people's feelings and discusses issues around them. They often do this through dance and music and they employ a youth worker who is a dance worker.

Through the work they do young people are involved at every stage, involved in the risk assessments etc. which makes them aware. While there is learning at the end of the work it is informal and creative.

They also run lunch time groups and after school clubs with year 9 young people. This session is run by two trainee youth workers. These two workers have come through as youth workers from working with the workers and are now working towards qualifications in youth work. These sessions often involve playing pool and cookery sessions and they are working towards the young people planning their own programme. While it is personal and social development the emphasis is on the social side.

They are currently working with a new accreditation format/tool... This is a relatively new implementation and was seen in relation to a restructuring in the service. They are supposed to work through this with groups who are excluded from lessons and complete units of assessment. This is issue-based and is supposed to be about meeting the young people's needs and offer them an alternative education.
(RD)

The emphasis in the language of representation is of full timetables, busy workers and engaged young people. And indeed, this does reflect something of the reality of the everyday world of successful youth work. A timetable of activity and 'doing things' – including the interpersonal one-to-one work informed by counselling perspectives – seems to offer an objective description of the work of youth projects. The virtues of the activities listed in programmes and timetables are sometimes self evident. They might involve learning a skill or addressing an issue but even when not self-evident, youth workers are keen to explain their underlying worth in terms relevant to their perceptions of the purposes of youth work. The choice of a particular range of activities for a programme can be justified according to the extrinsic and intrinsic qualities associated with the activity – such as its capacity for 'broadening experience,' 'team building,' for 'challenging,' for 'learning a skill' or 'gaining knowledge,' or for 'contributing to community cohesion' or 'active citizenship.' Moreover, activities can be explained as both diversionary and developmental and in this sense they fulfil the whole breadth of the youth work function – to control young people on the one hand and on the other to lead them, and society, to a brighter future.

The ability to think creatively about activities and programmes is therefore an important feature of the youth worker's skill. Activities are used to attract and engage young people, as a medium for systematic educational work and as a basis for tackling some of the issues specified as

priorities by funders and policy-makers:

> *If you ask them, the amount of times over the years we've consulted them, that's the first thing, somewhere to go and something to do. But then sometimes they don't know what they want to do because their own experience is limited in young years. So we've always been proactive, and throw in ideas at them, often with resistance; they dismiss it as rubbish. But cooking for instance, and arts stuff- often you get met with a negative, 'I can't do that, I'm no good at that,' because they're coloured by whatever experience they've had to date, usually in school. But we try and redress that by a number of activities, outdoor education stuff, cooking, crafts, but in the music as well. But a lot of them, the music we use that as a carrot, now it's dual-edged because there is skill development in there as well and young people have learned how to play instruments, guitars and drums, how to be part of a band situation, that's team work, working together or not. So there's a skill development, but the whole bit about the music, you can say the same about the arts and crafts, there's a self confidence, self esteem that, ' I can do this,' and that's had a big effect on a number of youngsters over the years. So self esteem, confidence building, skill development, that's the music side. And the DJ-ing, all aspects of music seem to have that too.*
> (DD – youth worker)

Given the number of opportunities presented by activities for explaining the benefits of youth work, it is hardly surprising that they are dominant in formal representations (Spence, 2001). For example:

> *[Outreach] has proved very successful...Most of the group organise themselves into teams for either a game of football or basketball for 1 hour, then afterwards they engage with the rest of the group and staff discussing and debating issues that affect their everyday lives. The group have also organised various activities over the year that helped develop their confidence and self esteem, communication skills and team building.*
> (Project Annual Report, 2006)

Even when importance is given to the self-directed use of space by young people, the stress of the text remains focused upon the activity and its relevance to some underlying purpose. This might not always be stated but is implied in the text. For example, the following suggests that one of the purposes is to increase the participation of BME groups:

> *The project currently operates an open door policy to young people over 16 with many people using the project for their own reasons. This can include use of the computer for Job search, C.V. writing, Internet and email. These are some of the reasons why members from the Muslim, Bangladeshi and Jewish community use it.*
> (Worker's Report, AGM, 2006)

There can be little doubt that the activities offered by youth projects are part of their attraction for young people and there are numerous examples in the data of young people gaining from their participation exactly the things which are claimed by the youth workers. However, purposeful activity, which takes young people beyond the recreational or which is developed

by youth workers as more than simple entertainment, is often more difficult to achieve and articulate than the formal representations of programmes and timetables suggest.

6.2 Not just 'things to do'

What the programmes and timetables and the formal texts do not adequately reflect is the amount of time and energy which is spent by workers attempting to determine which are the most appropriate activities, consulting about them, fundraising for them, organising them, publicising them, taking part in them and maintaining the interest of young people -particularly those who are likely to be unpredictable – and most of all, realising the purposes claimed for them. Even when activities are organised 'for their own sake' the amount of work for the youth workers can be significant. The following describes the actual day of a football tournament, and does not include the work which went on before the day itself:

> *There was quite a bit of admin work to do with the young people before the games could begin. All the young people wanted to do was start playing football. They had to hand in consent forms, the workers put together a register, they had to pay £1 each. Some young people did not have the money, the female worker was not concerned about this...The other female worker seemed to be a bit frustrated that she had done all of the work for the day... One volunteer who she had offered to pay to referee had rung in sick at the last minute. The trainee youth worker and the male detached worker had to take over as referee...Some young people...hung around the leisure centre and were causing problems. The leisure centre staff kept coming in and telling the workers this and asking them to deal with it...It is difficult because the workers had enough work to do with the young people in the tournament but then also had to deal with this. I had to go out and get drinks as the worker had not had time to do this. The manager did not come to the tournament as he was busy short-listing for the jobs.*
>
> *During the games the female worker was trying to think of awards to give the young people, e.g. one for the female player, awards for the police, outstanding players etc. Although the day was running quite smoothly the planning of the games and the scoring systems had not been sorted out beforehand so it was left to the workers to do this on the spot. There were also some miscalculations about the number of games and some young people were disgruntled when they didn't get to play the same number of games as some of the other teams.* (RD)

At the most basic level, youth workers use activities to attract young people to the youth project. Once young people are present, the activities can be used to engage them and direct their energies. To this extent activities serve a controlling function:

> *One of the problems I'm finding though if I can refer to the Kirksell boys' group is they say they want somewhere to go, they want their own space but unless you give them something to do other than one pool table they'll get agitated, they'll get bored and that's when the place starts to get destroyed. A space isn't really enough, maybe it is for some kids but for kids who've got*

a lot of energy and a lot of attitude, giving them a space just isn't enough. And you need to, if they are wanting to use the youth work facility, you need to find them something attractive otherwise you're setting yourself up for all kinds of problems. I think the ones at Stally are happy to come down and use it as a place to come down, meet their mates, hang out because they're good friends, and chat and have a laugh and use the computer and play pool and do whatever. But up the road I think they need something more focused than just a drop-in because they're getting bored and all kinds of issues come from that
(DD - youth worker)

Once activities are developed into programmes or incorporated into 'projects' they begin to serve a secondary function which is to not only engage the young people's attention and use their energies, but to do so systematically and towards some previously determined goal. In the traditional youth work setting, these goals are determined using knowledge of the young people and their circumstances. This knowledge is usually gained through informal, interpersonal contact with individuals, through an understanding of the nature of local communities, through an awareness of local youth subcultures and through an analysis of the ways in which specific 'youth' issues such as young parenthood are manifest in the local youth population. Timetables are usually constructed with a view to creating space for the workers to construct activities and programmes with individuals and groups with regard to all these reference points but also in the context of what funding might be available to pursue particular pieces of work. The funding which is available from government, and to a lesser extent from charitable sources, tends to follow policy priorities and inevitably workers have to make reference to these priorities in their goal-setting.

So, for example, whilst concern for work with young mothers was something which emerged from the feminist movement and became a feature of feminist youth work during the 1980s (Carpenter and Young, 1986) it was the identification of young mothers as a policy priority by the SEU (1999b) which promoted the more general incorporation of such work into youth project timetables. The funding which has been available to target young mothers has led to the establishment of targeted work with this group. At the same time it has meant that the activities offered to young mothers have had to fit not only their interests, but also the terms of the social exclusion agenda which aims to encourage their independence from state support, to be achieved through their participation in employment, education and training. These two reference points - the young women themselves, including their interests and their local circumstances, and the demands of policy, inform the development of programmes in youth projects. Those who work with young mothers attempt to organise the youth work so that the goals of both young people and policy can be combined. When there is dissonance between young people's goals and those required by policy, it becomes the job of the youth worker to manage this:

I do a programme, and it's normally a three month programme, but what we do is, just sit down and say to them, 'What would you like to do in the next three months?' Then for a while it was like, if you were taking people in, they wouldn't turn up, because to them it was like, 'This is boring!' But then I said to them, 'Look, this is helping you.' Even when we did computing, we've had computing classes and some of them didn't really want to learn the computer, so I

was saying to them, 'But most of the jobs now you have to know a bit about a computer. You don't have to know everything, but even how to do a bit of computing.' So if we'd arranged something, what I found was if we were doing a programme and arranging things, a lot of them were not turning up -especially when it was people coming in. If you were doing arts and crafts things it was like they were all here, you were inundated with them all, so I wasn't being hard on them, but I did say, 'Look you can't just come when we're doing something that you want to do, you've got to come when it's other things that are going on.' But we do sit as a group and I'll say to them, 'Right, you tell me what you want, and I will try my best to get it there'
(DD – young mothers' worker)

That this can be managed effectively is borne out by the comments of the young mothers concerned:

Maggie: *You get two hours away, and it helps you like with work and that, because they always get people in from the job centre, and stuff like, first aid – we done our first aid course as well*

Ruth: *Computing as well, we've done that.*

Maggie: *We've actually got a few certificates for being at the crèche, we got like our first aid, our computing, things like that have helped us a lot. And then we got a job, after that.*
(DD – young mothers)

In one project, the workers discussed the way in which they managed the process of competing demands partly through 'creative accountancy':

There is the money attached to issue and things at one end and the young people at the other and the youth workers job is to get the two things to meet. She talked about using drugs money to do the music project ...
(RD).

However, it is not always possible to effectively manage competing perspectives within the environment of youth work.

6.3 Activity as youth work

Sometimes in the youth work setting there is role confusion and difficulty in sustaining the central 'youth work' perspective. This is particularly the case in relation to 'specialist' work with young people:

While we were waiting I sat in... on a meeting with the new centre manager and workers who run the disability group once a week at the centre. They are planning a residential but there are problems in getting care staff. In the past they have done things that they shouldn't such

as lifting, giving out medication. The project manager had raised a lot of these issues when he came into post at the centre as the workers had been working in this way for years when they really shouldn't have but they had never been told not to. There are also issues to do with the parents of the young people, and the workers did not want to go with them. The project manager was talking about what the 'role' of a youth worker was, currently they were not doing youth workers roles, it was more like a carer, providing respite care. There is no room for youth work. They have not received any help from social services and they talked about the difficult obstacles they faced.
(RD)

Sustaining the central 'youth work' perspective and approach can be particularly problematic in the context of referral when the young people do not access the youth project through their own initiative and when there is no necessary unity of interest between the individuals in the groups referred. In two projects, groups formed on the basis of referral comprised a set of individuals each with their own particular behavioural or personal issues. In both these situations, there was no evident basis either for building group solidarity or for constructing a programme which related to common issues and interests. Programmes were devised with reference to abstract goals – such as 'improving behaviour' or 'engaging in alternative education.' The consequences for the youth work in such situations were generally negative.

In such contrived conditions, the primary task of the youth work during group activities became that of keeping the young people occupied and preventing them from engaging in destructive or disruptive behaviour. The purposeful intentions of the activity programmes were submerged in the necessity of maintaining order and safety:

The workers had met last night and agreed to implement a yellow/red card system, [to deal with unacceptable behaviour] which was introduced to the young people... The group then set off to go bowling... At first the young people mucked around with the machines, jumping to try to make the change fall out. They were asked not to, warned and then one young man got a yellow card. He seemed to settle after this. Then we went bowling, for the first hour the young people behaved and played the game well, but the food was late and when it came it was very poor. They began to lose patience and started mucking around, throwing more than one bowl, shutting a member of staff outside the building (another yellow card) going down the lanes. The games were abandoned and we tried to leave. There was a pick and mix sweet counter unattended – the young people started nicking sweets- one young man who already had a yellow card was caught red handed and given a red card, some sweets were returned, others weren't. We left with workers and young people in a bad mood...We got back to the centre, the young man with the 'red card' was told to leave- he would not be allowed to do football- a decision would be made later about whether he should be allowed on the trip tomorrow. He wouldn't leave the site, although he did leave the building. He then broke the door on the entrance to the building.
(RD)

he reality of working in such conditions and attempting to prevent chaos is seldom fully epresented in the public representation of youth work practice and does not fit easily into the

professional discourse of informal education. It is possible of course, that over time and with patience, the youth workers can have an effect upon the behaviour of difficult young people. In the project cited above, a great deal of one-to-one work with individuals was conducted in addition to the activity programme but out of sight of the research project, and there does seem to have been some progress in the behaviour of the referred group over the course of the whole programme:

> *Workers could give examples of moments (a young person apologising) or general changes (a young person being able to resist being wound up by his peers)... These moments or general trends seem to be very important to the workers, in term of giving their work meaning as well as being the examples that they use to show that the project is working.*
> (RD)

Confirming this, in interview with one of the young people, the following was recorded:

> Researcher: *Do you think you have changed at all since you have come here?*
>
> Gizmo: *Umm, I think I have become a bit more confident, every time I come, everyday it is a bit more confident.*
> (DD – young woman)

Nevertheless, such small gains are hard won in these conditions and it is not clear that it was achieved as a consequence of the group activities of the youth work as opposed to the social work skills of one of the full time workers. The informal educational perspective of youth work is not principally a therapeutic one and the informal educational approach depends upon some minimal preconditions, one of which is that the young people involved are amenable to the development of constructive inter-personal dialogue with each other and with workers.

In the open environment, when different groups and individuals access youth projects, there are frequently young people present whose behaviour is difficult or disruptive. 'Policing' undoubtedly figures in the everyday practice of most youth workers and sometimes the activities organised are undertaken in full knowledge that the youth worker role will be mainly a policing one in this context. However, when young people whose behaviour is not defined as specifically problematic are also present, there is usually an ameliorating effect upon those who are more difficult. Youth workers depend on this variety within youth groups in order to work with them effectively, mobilising the positive aspects of peer group pressure and playing to the strengths of different young people in a context of common group interest and inter-relatedness. One of the problems with a referral process which allocates groups to a pre-planned youth work programme is that it demands time, energy and specialist skill which are often beyond the capacity and resources of youth workers. The resulting conditions are at the very least, exhausting and undermining for workers:

> *While I was sitting with the workers they talked about the nightmare that the seaside trip had been. With many of the young people behaving really badly, running off, getting caught stealing. How tired they had been at the end of the day having spent what felt like the whole day chasing the young people around.*

I was absolutely knackered when I got home, covered in black dust from the power station and bruised and bleeding from the ice skating.

The female worker said she was so wound up and angry with them that she could cry.
(RD)

Given youth worker claims about their ability to work with groups of young people, the difficulty in achieving anticipated outcomes in conditions like this can undermine professional confidence. Whilst all youth workers experience intense periods of exhausting work, often associated with activities such as residentials and day trips with large numbers of excited young people, this pace is not normally sustained over the period of a complete programme. In one case, a volunteer who had previously been interested in pursuing a career in youth work was so disenchanted and tired out by the experience of an activities programme with a referred group that she decided to look elsewhere.

In another project, the resistance of individual members of a group referred by a school were expressed passively rather than actively. They simply refused to co-operate with the 'alternative education' programme delivered in the youth work setting:

One young woman put up her hood and slumped over the table with her face covered, complaining that she thought the group was supposed to be for 13 to19-year-olds and that this was 'too childish.' Another worker intervened and said he had done computing at university at degree level and had to do things like this- she was not impressed by this. The first worker tried a different tack, 'But we have to do this for ASDAN- sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do.' The young woman began asking whether she 'had to come' to this. The worker replied that the young woman would have to talk to the school if she didn't want to come. The young woman then asked if the project tells the school whether or not the young people have turned up, the worker said that they wouldn't 'ignore the fact' if the young people didn't turn up.
(RD)

The energies of the youth workers used to engage the young people and to encourage them to work as a group in this context were constantly undermined, yet because particular content was specified and because particular goals had to be achieved, the workers could not reconstruct the programme according to the realities of the young people present. In this situation, the work was directly related to the demands of formal education and the youth work was being constructed with reference to an agenda set outside its own professional discourses. This involves a loss of agency for youth workers and commits them to service to other professional priorities. It is difficult to imagine how professional self-confidence amongst youth workers can be sustained in such circumstances.

The claim of youth workers that their practice depends upon voluntary participation is significant. A necessary corollary of this is that the programmes that are devised to engage young people in purposeful activity are derived from knowledge of the young people themselves - as individuals, groups, members of communities or subcultures, with particular interests and

capacities. To design programmes which do not refer primarily to the positive identities of the young people, which respond to 'deficit,' 'lack' or 'failure' in relation to other social institutions and with reference to goals created externally, without the participation of the young people, is to set up youth work to fail. This does not mean that youth work itself is problematic, but that it does not work well in response to abstractions. It needs constant grounding in the realities of young people's lives, the knowledge which comes from dialogue with them and the willingness to attempt to meet their self-defined needs and interests in order to succeed.

When these criteria are reflected in the programmes and timetables, the youth work intervention can be exceptionally fruitful and productive (Brent, 2004). The young skateboarders who participated in the focus group stage of the research described how the youth workers worked alongside them on a number of levels. Firstly, they acknowledged the legitimacy of their interest in skating as an activity and helped them to find places to skate legitimately and safely. Secondly, they encouraged them to produce a skating video and through a six week programme to do some research about the difficulties of finding somewhere to skate to be presented to politicians as part of a campaign to have a skate park developed. Thirdly, they brought together skaters from different communities and cultures to skate together and to work together on breaking down differences and barriers between them. The consequences were not only positive for the young people themselves, but also for parents who were more at ease about their children going out to skate, and for local people who felt less threatened by skaters; the outcomes included improved relations between young people and authority figures in local communities including police and local politicians and improved relations between young people from different places and community cultures, as well as the possibility of achieving the development of a skate park. For the young people, the intervention of the youth workers had nothing but positive effects, and whilst facilitating their skating subculture was foundational, they understood that this went beyond the skating activity itself:

> Researcher: *If as young people you were going to set up an inspection team that was going to go round and look at youth projects, to see how they work and if they are any good, what sort of things would you look for?*
>
> Craig: *The leisureness of it; is it laid back or are you actually being forced to do something? Because if you're forced to do something then it isn't really worth your while coming to it. And if you are going to have to pay through the nose for it, like we had [before]! We paid barely nothing to go down to [Southplace with the youth workers] and it was brilliant. One of the best things that has happened to me like.*
>
> Andy: *Nice people, I can vouch for the people at this youth group, and a couple of other ones, they are all nice people, they are here to work with you rather than against you, they are here to work for you rather than just to get the job done, and get the next pay packet.*
>
> Researcher: *Have you got any suggestions about the things we should look at when we go around visiting youth projects? You've said about it being laid back and things like that.*
> Craig: *They're laid back but they are getting the job done. They may be sitting and chatting with us, but we are still doing the interviews and we're still working towards an actual purpose. And that's one of the main things, it isn't a youth club, it's actually working with us*

to actually, there's always an aim towards the end of it. Like this one the aim was to go to [Southplace] and to get the video made to go to the council. The one before that was to get a video made before the end of it. So we could all have a copy of us skating.
(FG – young people)

The purposefulness of project programming and its possibilities for achieving such positive outcomes is partly what gives youth work its legitimacy as a service for young people and it is therefore central to the everyday in youth work. However, the descriptive power of activity and its goal-orientated potential can obscure from view other aspects of youth work practice which are less easily verbalised or represented. For equally important to the activism, as the skateboarders imply is that youth workers are understood by the young people to have a personal commitment which reaches beyond the professional confines of paid work. This personal commitment is manifest in working 'alongside' the young people and it takes the form of being 'laid back' and 'chatting' whilst at the same time keeping an eye on the purpose.

For youth workers, the programmes and the timetables are not only ends in themselves, but at the same time a means to a whole range of objectives associated with professional purpose:

Researcher: *What are you hoping young people will get out of participating in those groups?*

Ian: *Personal development, growth. Hopefully develop attitudes that then help them become active members of the community, citizens – all that kind of thing.*

Researcher: *And what kind of things, in terms of programming and process, how do you try and make that happen?*

Ian: *Through conversation, through listening to what they want to do, through challenging them sometimes – challenging them a lot actually. It's quite a new group and it's come out of the need for something like this in the area because there is ongoing issues with young males and young females in Kilntown. And they need some kind of guidance to help them get over that 16, 17 year old period and become young adults. So hopefully just to construct a programme that'll respond to what they want to do, and also try and do drop-in, just chatting, talking, pool, have a cup of tea, that kind of stuff.*
(DD – youth worker)

Across all the projects in the research, the workers were observed taking opportunities within projects to listen to young people, to engage in conversations with them and to encourage conversations and discussions between them which did not necessarily have anything at all to do with the activity in hand, or the programme in which that activity was a part:

The worker talked about the young mothers group, they run sessions around arts and crafts, where the young women can chat together about all sorts of issues
(RD)

It gives them their quality time, whether they want to do anything in the group, or just want

to sit and have a discussion. And a lot of the time I'll find that if you say to them, 'Right what do you want to do today? Do you want to get stuck in and do something, or do you want to just sit and have a discussion?' A lot of the time they will say, 'We are in the mood for a chat today. Can we just sit and have a chat?' And then they will all open up. And if they're at home, sometimes they wouldn't open up to their parents because they are too close to them. So they'll open up with one another or they'll open up with me. So I feel that group does help that way.
(DD – young mothers' worker).

Here the activity of arts and crafts was programmed not only because the young people were interested in it, but also because it offered flexibility and the space to 'just chat' without subverting any plans.

Opportunities taken just 'to chat' were part of the process of relationship-building and in practice they provided some of the background information needed to construct timetables and programmes which were relevant to the young people and which systematised some of the issues raised. They also generated work over and above that which was written into timetables and not generally included in the documentary evidence of the project. For the topics which arose in conversation with the young people could not always be incorporated into project planning or accounting. This was particularly the case when workers were dealing with individual young people who needed support around personal issues:

The worker talked about having a social audit done of the project. A man had come down to look at the project (a drop-in) and wanted to know how long the workers spent with each client. The worker explained that it depended on the issue, that some young people may only be there five minutes and others (if there was a sexual abuse issue for example) could take days. The man was not satisfied with this answer and wanted to know how long on average the worker spent with each young person.
(RD)

The needs of young people in reality constantly spill over the edges of and intrude upon the efficient operation of programming and timetabling. Sometimes they subvert the successful completion of an activity. At other times, they intrude upon time set aside for administration and bureaucracy. Sometimes they also impinge directly upon the free time of workers. In the main, youth workers believed that the actual, everyday needs of young people could neither be completely predicted nor contained within pre-planned programmes and timetables. In the practice of youth work, it is the conversations and the work which derives directly from the informal contact with workers and young people which is most highly valued by workers and young people alike. Yet in the representations of youth work, this work takes a minor place. Certainly, in the work which is undertaken in response to policy and funding imperatives it is the programmes of activity which are most conspicuously promoted and used within partnership arrangements. In the process, there is a danger that an equally important aspect of youth work, engaging with young people's 'being' as well as their 'doing' will be 'written out' of the public frame for youth work. Insofar as such work continues to be pursued, the evidence from the research is that it is increasingly being pursued within the personal framework of youth workers' understanding of their professional role and responsibility.

Chapter 7:

Communicating With Young People

I think conversation is the most important thing in youth work if I'm to be honest. Its not just when you're working with young people it's in your profession. Conversation. That's where everything comes from, your ideas, what you're going to do next, where your contacts come from, everything comes from conversations that you have with people. Without it I don't even think youth work would even exist.
(DD - outreach worker)

7.1 Listening to young people

Communication with young people is the principal method and focus of youth work. Active messages are communicated through a range of media, including buildings, programmes and timetables, but most important for progressing an informal educational approach is the quality of the communication which takes place in the dialogue between young people and youth workers. It is in conversation that youth workers are able to learn about young people and ascertain what might be appropriate action for the youth project to take on their behalf. It is through talking with youth workers that young people come to understand that the youth project might offer more that the immediately apparent and useful recreational space. By its nature, conversation is about relationships. For it to succeed, those engaged in it must also listen, and be sensitive to the meanings which the others are communicating (Smith,1994).

Listening and sensitivity to the other person are often more important that talking. It is through their listening that youth workers demonstrate their commitment to and respect for young people and it is only when the verbal interventions of the youth worker are meaningful and appropriate in the young person's terms that relationships of trust begin to be established. As a starting point, this means that youth workers must be aware that sometimes young people do not want to engage in conversation. In the environment of the project, workers must decipher the meaning of silences as well as sounds. Sometimes these signify nothing more than a legitimate desire on the part of the young person to relax and make use of the project's facilities. At another time they may signify crisis. Youth workers who are 'on duty' must therefore be constantly alert to other signals of communication including body language, general behaviour, and peer group relations.

For many of the youth workers in the research the success of their communication with young people relied as much upon 'giving space' as it did to intervening and acting out an agenda:

Kerry: *I think, from the ones that I've been speaking to, they seem to think the [project] people respect them and sort of treat them...a bit more mature, like adults. Not like adults, but, you know, give them the freedom to do what they want to do, without the guidelines of parents and teachers and stuff like that. The ones I've been surveying recently they really like that, and that's why they've come back and want to come back more and do more stuff.*

Sharon: ... *we don't have an agenda for them, like social workers would have or teachers would have. It's open, it's open and it gives them free space, as well, that they don't really get anywhere else.*

Danny: *It's that they're welcome, we just provide a little bit of breathing space for them to be, begin thinking about, or not thinking about, or just however they want to be, with what ever might be going on for them at the time. We just provide that little extra space that they can begin to sort of move through whatever it is that they want to do, or get the support for.*
(FG - youth workers)

It is only in such an environment that conversation can become a developmental method, because meaningful dialogue depends upon all participants having power to negotiate its terms and content. Once their power to influence the use of time and space, and their influence over the pace and content of conversation is recognised by the young people, they are then more likely to engage openly in a relationship. In the development of this relationship they come to realise that they can access youth workers as facilitators, mentors and advocates. From their side youth workers can begin to pursue their informal educational purposes in a manner responsive to the realities of young people's lives and levels of understanding:

When we got back to the centre one worker said that while listening to some of the discussions in the back of the minibus he felt that there were some issues that they could work on with this group in the future. One was racism.
(RD)

Creating space for silence, and listening also means that youth workers hear what might not be 'on the surface' or what might be inaudible to others. There were situations recorded in the research diaries where it was obvious that the youth worker was picking out signs within and beyond the noise of activities, and everyday hubbub to focus upon an individual or a group of young people for attention with the purpose of developing a conversation.

Being able to do this effectively depends to some extent upon having some pre-knowledge of the young people concerned. Listening and interpreting signals happens within a social and knowledge context. Sometimes youth workers had knowledge of young people from their childhood and had through contact with them developed a broader understanding of their lives:

We saw some young people walking along with alcohol. The worker talked about one boy who was about 9 years old. She knew the family and said that he had been in trouble in the youth centre before and she rang his father to collect him but he was drunk and wouldn't. So they had to call the police. This had happened on two occasions... We saw a young man aged about

18 who the worker had worked with a few years ago but he had moved out of the town. She caught up on his whereabouts and told him to come to the centre. She was surprised to have seen him and by the sound of it she had done quite a lot of work with him.
(RD)

Such knowledge comes partially from the rootedness of some youth projects in the local community and also from the seamlessness of everyday life within the project where the structured and unstructured, the informal, semi-formal and formal overlap. Contact and communication in different circumstances contributes to a range of narratives about individuals, families and groups which youth workers can draw upon to inform their understanding.

7.2 Talking on different levels

This seamlessness and the blurred boundaries of different aspects of the work was reflected in the ways in which young people communicated with projects. Sometimes such communication was goal-orientated and purposeful – particularly in the most structured, activities-based work. But at all times the immediate purposive activity was overlaid with the informal. The young people took what they could from the formal – whether that led to certificates or portfolios or a job and insofar as this was important to them so they engaged fully with structured conversation.

However, what they gained from the youth work setting which they most valued was the opportunity for informality where other things which come out of the contact seem almost to be accidental – a consequence of the contact rather than its purpose for them:

She said that she comes to the centre because, 'It's somewhere to go, to keep warm.' She also said that she doesn't drink as much as she used to because she comes to the centre now. Both said that they like 'Chatting to the youth workers.' One said that, 'Workers make you think' and that they are easier to talk to about issues rather than parents. They 'Don't tell you off' and they 'Give you lots of options.'
(RD)

Whilst the thrust of policy is to credit the systematic and organised conversations of youth work which are goal-orientated and purposive, the reality of the everyday developmental conversations of youth work is that they take place at a number of different levels. So even in projects which were highly structured and goal-orientated, to be successful it was necessary for the workers to engage with immediate and personal issues as well as with the systematic conversation which related to 'training,' 'challenge' or 'curriculum.'

One young woman, on the all female team, left the exercise half way through in tears as she was felling unwell- she had barely slept so far this week and one of the female workers went with her and they later came back and watched the rest of the exercise and the worker was talking to her about what her plans were for September.
(RD)

The session began with chat, as each young person arrived the workers check in with them, how their jobs/school/college/relationships were going. One young woman had just got a new boyfriend (having moved on from the old one quite fast). There was some informal challenging of this through jokes (and when did you finish with him Friday? Workers pulling faces). One young man was clear that he wasn't playing around any more and had made a decision to take it more seriously with a former girlfriend. One young woman's Nan had just died, she talked about this for a while. She had decided not to go to the funeral, a worker gently helped her explore this, checking that she wouldn't regret this decision later. There was a conversation about how many houses people had lived in, with workers and young people both sharing (one worker had grown up in a very big house, another had lived in caravans and a bus- it was a very open conversation, possibly unlike those young people would regularly have with adults.

There was then a more business type bit where workers checked availability for future trips, asking for consent forms etc. They talked to the young people about their future role in the project... possibly becoming peer mentors ...

Just before the exercise began the male worker did a card trick that seemed to act as a way to begin to focus the group. The exercise was then introduced.
(RD)

Purposeful and systematic conversations are related to the expectation amongst young people of outcome-orientated activity and some projects are more geared to such an approach than others. However, whether a project is constructed at one side of a spectrum as mainly structured, curriculum based and outcome led, or at the other end as mainly flexible, informal and open-ended, space must always be available for the immediate, the light-hearted and the developmental in order to retain the specific youth work ethos.

Informative, serious and developmental conversations are leavened by the light and chatty banter or exchange of pleasantries, and all conversation in youth projects is characterised by variety of intensity and depth in communication. The light and chatty is the informal thread which sustains communication between the more intense moments of developmental or structured discussion and debate. Even though its content might be immediate and unsystematic, it is nevertheless important not only in creating ease and space in projects, but also because it is used to facilitate the beginnings of the interpersonal knowledge between the young person and the youth worker. Often it is the youth worker who must initiate such conversations in the early stages of a young person's involvement with a project, and knowing how to pitch the conversation – when to be silent, when to be light-hearted and when to ask personal questions or develop 'issue-based' discussion is a highly skilled process.

It's a skill of a youth worker, that's the difference with good staff, trained staff or experienced staff picking up on those moments and make something out of nothing. I think with the teenage mums, they sit and do the activity they do and the conversation that comes out and often about their social life – drinking, 'We're going out on Friday night to get drunk.' Obvious thing for you to say, 'Why are you going to get drunk? Are you going out for a drink and perhaps you'll get drunk? But why is it you've got to go with the intention of getting drunk?'

And then you get that opens doors for lots of things, 'What if somebody spikes your drink? Date rape?' It's the quality and experience of staff are important there (interruption – background noise)...I think our youth workers we try and encourage them to work in a certain way, challenging, non judgemental, to try and understand the type of young people we're working with and to create these opportunities if they don't arise normally in conversation, to be proactive and create these moments... I think some of the best youth work comes out of things like that, a discussion. You know, 'Let's sit down and discuss females drinking,' that's too heavy going, but when it crops up and it can be related to their everyday practice, 'We are going out on Friday and getting drunk,' then you start to question it and throw little things, like out of the newspaper...
(DD- youth worker)

Sometimes, even when youth workers know the young people concerned, verbal interventions meet with resistance. This happens most often when a worker or young person is new to a project, when workers are inexperienced, or when the young person has made contact for purposes other than those suggested by the content of the conversation:

Two young men arrived. One asked where the female worker was as soon as he walked in. The trainee told him that she would be back in a while and they stayed in the centre. They were talking amongst themselves and playing with mobile phones. The trainee youth worker was trying to engage them in conversation. He knew one of the young men and was asking him how his course was going. The young man had dropped out of the course [it is a six week course... which is a precursor to courses such as E2E]. He said he had got bored with the course and preferred to stay at home all day. The worker tried to talk to him about this but just received one word answers or grunts back most of the time. He was asking him if he wanted to get a job where he would be able to earn money to then be able to do things. The young man said that he did not want any of this, he just wanted to sit around all day and that he got £2 a day from his gran. The worker was continually trying to talk to him and engage him in conversation, but there was little in return from the young man.
(RD)

Beginning conversation and engaging young people is skilled work. Youth workers must approach their early contacts in a manner which understands and seeks to breaks down those barriers of defensiveness against adults in general, against institutions, against peer group bravado which many young people bring with them to projects – and particularly to the more informal projects which are locally-based. In structured, activities-based projects young people expect to be drawn into conversation which relates directly to an activity. Youth workers do not initially attempt to become familiar with the personal lives of the young people involved. This can only happen later, and over time. Similarly, for those young people who access open projects as a place to relax and engage in self-directed recreation, the youth worker must be careful not to subvert these intentions in the process of initiating conversation. Again, conversation will often take place simply in relation to the activity. The early stages of inter-personal contact between youth workers and young people are not necessarily undertaken as one-to-one communication and are more often broached most effectively and light-heartedly with groups, using common experiences such as having watched a popular film, as a foundation for the chat

and often deploying humour to encourage those involved to relax.

With some young people who access youth projects, conversation might never move beyond the activity-orientated or the superficial, but with those who make regular contact, who are seen regularly in detached sessions or who make frequent use of buildings, it invariably does develop as they become more comfortable with the surroundings, come to understand how projects can be used and what they offer, and become more aware of the role of the youth worker. Even then, light conversation, or conversation designed simply to impart information about the project's programmes and activities, remains important as part of the sociability of project life.

Everyday chat is crucial to the maintenance of the 'friendly' atmosphere of youth projects communicating to the young people that this is not an organisation which treats them as a 'problem' or their lives as a 'period of transition' but rather one which values them as full human beings in their here and now. So what youth workers sometimes describe as 'banter' infiltrates the everyday atmosphere of youth work sessions:

> *That's another thing I would say is the most important things to me keeping the face-to-face work up and getting conversations going, getting banter going and just keeping in touch I think that's it. Keeping in touch with people on their level*
> (DD – detached youth worker)

7.3 Boundaries and possibilities

The development of trust in the contact between youth worker and young person, which is essential to the possibility of developing dialogue at a deeper level, depends upon the creation of an atmosphere of friendliness but in the process the youth worker must also establish relational boundaries. So the young people gradually learn that the chattiness and banter is friendliness, 'but not friendship' and that it is only if such boundaries are respected that the worker will be in a position to take the place of a fully trusted adult with whom their conversations can become more 'risky'.

> *The manager was trying to explain to them that youth workers are not and cannot be young people's friends as one young woman had said this. He said that could be friendly but not friends. He said that they had relationships with young people but not friendships. The female worker said that because she knew the young women so well that it would be possible to tell by their attitude, body language, mood whether there was a problem or something they were not happy about and if it needed to be pursued at that point.*
> (DD – educational session set up for the research)

As appropriate conditions are established and the young people come to understand the professional role of youth workers, they often feel able to talk about subjects which are not possible elsewhere and in a manner which is beyond the restrictions imposed by other informal and formal relationships with adults. A conversation between young people and workers where trust has been established, can very quickly move from the mundane or the light-hearted into

the serious (and back again). In the process, the young person is free to take from it what they need and to stop it when they want, whilst the worker can impart useful information whilst at the same time gleaning privileged knowledge from the perspective of young people upon which future work can be established:

> *Two young women came into the centre... They wanted to know if there was going to be a meeting about the residential with the detached worker later that day. The manager did not know so they decided to stay around for a while to wait for the other worker. They sat down with us and started chatting about what they had been up to, mostly revolving around boys. It was an interesting conversation, they obviously felt very at ease with the male worker. One spoke about meeting a young man last night while she was out, the other spoke about various people she liked etc. The manager later said that they used to be even more boy mad a year ago and wouldn't talk about anything else! They talked about relationships and having sex. The manager was talking about his experiences as a young man. The manager introduced questions, asking 'Is it worth having sex with a boy if they do not mean anything to them? What does the boy think, how does he act?' They also talked about safe sex and about not rushing into things often in relation to their friends. They were really open with him and in front of me as I'd only met them once before. Through such conversations the manager gets a lot of information from young people as they talk freely about other young people and what people are up to...*
> (RD)

As workers in another location recognised:

> *I think... it's probably one of the only places they can come to talk about sex or drugs or alcohol or whatever. They can't maybe, necessarily do that at school and they can't do it at home. So... apart from talking to their peers it's really the only opportunity they get to talk to adults about anything they want. Nothing is off limits...If they want to talk about anything they can talk about it here, with us. So it's one of the only places they get to do that. It's important that they should have somewhere like that.*
> (FG - youth workers)

The combination of ethical professional behaviour on the part of workers within informal inter-personal relationships in which the humanity of young people is central, allows for the possibility of moving beyond the normal boundaries of professional conversation. Everyday life becomes a topic of interest and value in the youth project setting and it is this which encourages the young people to trust workers and to expand the range of their discussions beyond the light and chatty into the more in-depth meaningful areas where they might discover information, have questions answered and begin a process of learning in ways which are silenced or out-of-bounds in other settings other than perhaps, those of the peer group. Moreover, as one young woman commented: 'You learn that it is OK to look stupid sometimes. People do not laugh at you.'

Mostly such 'risky' conversations take place in public - in group situations where more than one young person, and sometimes more than one worker is present. This not only further increases

the safety of the risk taking, but also offers opportunities to extend the range of the learning as the conversation builds and develops into deeper discussion in which a range of opinions can be given.

> *One young woman talked about how she liked the way in which we were all sitting talking and said that she thought it was educational to sit and talk and also that it was good because she did not think of it as learning in a formal way even though she does learn from sitting and talking to workers.*
> (RD)

The informal group context in which conversation can move from the light, through the informative, into the issue-based and sometimes into deeper reflection and critical questioning, depersonalises the issues which young people bring to the content. The discussion legitimises their questions in ways which encourage reflective understanding and moral positioning. This contributes to self-confidence and the expression of personal agency when discussing the same topic as a personal 'problem' might have the opposite effect.

7.4 Talking about issues

An important part of the educational art of the youth worker is to facilitate the transformation of personal into social issues, and to understand the relevance of the social for the personal. Sometimes this might mean engaging in informal discussion with groups of young people about a subject such as smoking, violence or alcohol which the youth worker understands as a social issue affecting young people in general but which might at the same time have personal consequences.

> *The young women were talking about the drugs that are available in the area. This gave the worker the chance to ask them about what is going around at the time. There seemed to be a lot of concern about the current lot of ecstasy going around and the worker was able to discuss some of the issues surrounding this with the young people. There seems to be a problem with the drugs being cut with other chemicals which he was talking to the young people about, to make them aware. In some ways it's surprising how much the young people know but in other ways some of the beliefs they hold are worrying, the myths that must go around on the streets.*
> (RD)

A young person affected by the negative consequences of drug-taking might in such an environment join in a group discussion and learn how to address some issues associated with drugs without ever attracting a label associated with 'problem', 'deviant' or 'deficient'.

> *Someone picked up a drugs education leaflet and he started going through all the drugs he'd taken and what he had no intention of taking and it was an eye opener, 'Taken that. Taken that. What the hell is that?' You tell him what it involves. 'God I'm not going anywhere near that!' And then you start about, 'When do you take it? How often do you take it? What do you*

think about it?' That opens a drugs discussion with them. And then you would need to find out from there what their attitudes are and that happens on a regular basis with drugs and with alcohol.
(DD - youth worker)

Young people bring the learning which they achieve in these situations back into their own external networks – to their families, their siblings and their friends in particular. The conversation in the youth project has an impact which reverberates beyond its confines.

Not all understanding of 'issues' comes from conversations with young people. Youth workers are aware of the concerns generated in the media, discussed in a variety of public situations and informed by hard evidence about the world of the young. Organisational policies, as much as the realities of young people's lives inform the educational content of youth work interventions and conversations and sometimes this is integrated into the development of educational programmes or activities which systematically address topics of concern. When work is targeted at specific groups such as Muslim young people, young mothers or young people excluded from school, then it is particularly likely that the communication between young people and the youth workers will be negotiated between the informal and the formal. But it is in relation to its potential for enabling informal association that the more systematic goal-orientated behaviour facilitated:

Denise: *I think that's one of the main things about coming though isn't it? So like a place where you can be comfortable and get certificates and things instead of having to go to college where people might not be so confident to do that.*

Researcher: *What makes it more comfortable then, could you put your finger on what it is about the project?*

Denise: *I think like if you compare it to a college or something that's like really daunting to think about for some people. Walking into like a big, massive campus. And then just coming into a little place like here with just a few people makes you feel sort of more of at ease just to come and sort of have a cup of tea and do work that way more informally.*
(DD - young woman)

Sometimes, the identification of specific issues to be addressed within projects involves specialist workers, or workers with specialist responsibilities. Such workers come to be identified by the young people in relation to these topics, and will access the youth project specifically to seek out the specialist information or support required. Yet even here, the surrounding informality and the ability to contextualise such work within a larger framework of 'unproblematic' communication, is highly valued by the young people involved:

The female detached worker, as usual, had to spend most of her time dealing with young people's sexual health problems. A young man and woman came in and wanted to see her but she was busy with another young woman so the manager asked them if they wanted to come and sit in the main room with the rest of us for a while. They did this and everyone

was chatting about music and television, it was a relaxed atmosphere (during this time I was coming in and out of the room as the manager was asking young people if they would talk to me as they were arriving and he had arranged a room where we could do this). The female worker then took them both to the clinic.
(RD)

Such work leads to the possibility of youth workers also being identified as resources for individual young people to bring problems and issues which they believe will be treated differently from the response which they might receive elsewhere. Much one-to-one work which is undertaken in the context of youth projects is unpredictable in the everyday and often happens in the interstices between more structured, programmed events and activities.

Sometimes conversation has to be picked up from traumas and crises which young people bring into the project from their lives outside:

There was general chat in the room between the workers, the caretaker and on occasion the young women. They were trying to get the young woman who was ill to go home but she refused. She went to the toilet and the other young woman, her friend, said that she thought she was having some problems with her mother at home. When she came back through, the manager asked if she wanted to go into the office to talk to him and they both went into the office and were in there for over an hour.
(RD)

This type of situation can happen at any time – in the middle of a structured event, during a 'drop-in' or when the project workers are involved in other, unrelated pieces of work or even when the project is closed.

This young woman who's just dropped in this morning early because she's obviously got this crisis in her life and yet we have to be in with a group at half past nine...You can't just say, ' I'm sorry, come back at three o'clock,' because she could go and self harm or something in those six hours. So you've got to be able to step back and say, whoever you're working with, 'I need to be with so and so for a while because there's a problem.'
(DD – youth worker)

Occasionally workers find that their one-to-one work with young people involves them in processes of inter-agency work and referral when the issues are beyond the remit of the professionalism of the youth worker:

He also spoke about the young woman who had been coming to the project and who there were issues with. Apparently she had been leaving notes at the project, it seems because she wanted people to find them. He had been to a meeting at the school with two teachers and her mother. It has been decided that she needs to see a psychologist which is being arranged. The school have noticed how she is becoming more demanding on their time.
(RD)

\part from the confidential work which takes place in relation to young people who have ntensely personal needs or problems, and which of necessity were beyond the range of data ollection in the research, youth workers mostly operate on a public stage dealing with a range \f different levels and types of conversation simultaneously. In the open context of 'drop-n' or 'detached' or during outings, conversation can be multi-faceted, moving between, and ometimes operating simultaneously at different levels as chat becomes information exchange, s boundaries are tested and discussions developed:

We then stopped outside a house where there was a group of young people. It seemed like there were a couple of teenage girls, some younger ones, a few from earlier and two older lads. There were many different conversations taking place at once. The male worker was talking to the older lads about what they were doing: one of them was working and another of them wasn't doing anything. They said that they might be starting to run something during the day for young people who aren't employed etc. and they would let him know if this happened. They were asking him what he would like to do. They were talking to some other young people about football, what tops they had on, teams they supported etc. Another group of young people walked up the street but went into a house a couple of doors away. Some other young people joined the group. The workers were making sure that all the young people knew that they had moved location. One girl was asking about the drop-in and they were trying to explain this to her...They were also letting the young people know about the summer activities and encouraging them to come along and put their names down. There was lots of friendly chat. The young people obviously know the workers; they did not seem bothered that they had come and spoken to them where they were. It was the workers who decided it was time to move on to get back to the centre.
(RD - detached session)

The conversations were 'all over the place'. Topics included one young man who was talking about not paying a fine. The worker said that he should sort this out as he may end up serving a couple of days in prison if he didn't: it was for riding a 'mini motor'. One young man who had not been going to the E2E training programme which quite a few of the young men are on, said he was not going because he hadn't been given his money. The manager said that he should phone them and let them know his situation. The manager was trying to encourage some of the young men to go on a DJ course, but said this was only if they were going to participate. He also wanted to get some young women to get involved in this course. One young man seemed a bit nervous about the prospect of it but agreed in the end. The manager completed the consent forms for them and gave them out to take home for signatures.

They talked to the manager about him being a vegetarian, his family life, where he lived! They are in the same football league and talked about the match they had played against each other at the weekend, saying the manager was really different when he wasn't working. The manager did not really have to do a great deal in these conversations as they were generated and led by the young people. It was a lot of questions aimed at him. They talked about films. One young man was pulled up in particular for inappropriate use of language on a number of occasions. He seemed to be playing up a bit: he was on the computer with his back to the manager but kept saying things that the manager would pull him up on. He would argue his

point not facing the manager and this began about an hour into the session and continued until the end.
(RD)

Even in talking with just one young person, conversation can sometimes move at its own pace between the 'light' and the 'serious' enabling the 'serious' to be leavened by the everydayness of it, preventing the serious becoming 'an issue' but at the same time providing opportunities for the exchange of information, advice and opinions which would enable young people to act appropriately:

The young woman then went on to talk about and show us a new skirt that she had just bought to go to an under-18s foam party on Wednesday night that she was looking forward to. The female worker was joking with her and asking if any of the boys she fancied where going to be going. She then talked about how her younger brother is getting bullied at school and the teachers do not seem to be doing much to stop it. The worker was aware of this situation and talked to her about what it was like at school and how he was. The worker said that she had told her brother to keep a diary of the different incidents and then take it to the head teacher or head of year as telling individual teachers about individual incidents did not seem to be working. The worker said that the school are supposed to have an anti-bullying policy and didn't seem very impressed with the way the situation was being handled. The young woman said that she tried to spend time with him at lunch time and that because she had loads of her own friends she didn't mind if she lost some because of being with her brother! The worker said that this wasn't really right and it should not just be up to her but it needed to be dealt with by the teachers.
(RD)

7.5 Conversation and education

Transference of information in response to the concerns of young people raised within informal conversation was a major and highly significant part of the communication between young people and youth workers recorded in the research data. Although there are aspects of informal educational theory which suggest the possibility of developing such interventions as 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1972), in the main, the interventions of youth workers were more prosaic than this. It is true that as a consequence of their engagement with youth projects some young people became more fully engaged with learning in both a formal and informal sense. The young mothers who took examinations and sustained their education as a result of the contact with youth workers were a particular example of this. It is also true that the personal and social skills of many young people derived from their involvement with youth projects through structured or semi-structured educational programmes and schemes and through their involvement for instance with mentoring, peer education or drama. The consequences of such interventions are easy to measure or to discuss in terms of concrete outcomes.

What is less easy to itemise, yet was central to the majority of the work observed, was informal everyday chat which could not be pre-planned. Such conversation led to the acquisition of

information useful in the here and now. There were 'moments' of discussion, which generated debate, enlightenment and understanding. These were sometimes fleeting and sometimes were tangential to the more obvious activities and events taking place. Such moments are highly valued by both young people and youth workers alike. They might not lead to 'critical consciousness' in the broader, politicised sense of that concept, and they might not lead to accredited outcomes, but they do add to the thoughtfulness, the knowledge, the moral consciousness and the sociability of the young people involved. It is this which encourages them to develop their own sense of responsibility and agency and it is this which makes their current everyday reality, as much as their futures, a better place.

This is particularly evident in relation to the importance which youth workers attach to education in relation to prejudice and discrimination and the negative attitudes which many young people hold about others. There was a constant sub-theme running through conversations between young people and youth workers in relation to these matters and it was apparent that many young people were actively and thoughtfully engaging with these issues through their contact with youth work. For example:

> *The manager was joking with one of the young women about wearing all pink clothes and he said he was just going to call her 'pinkie', she responded that she didn't call him 'blackie' because he was wearing all black clothes and then she stopped what she was saying and said that she didn't mean anything racist by saying it, the manager then talked to her about how it didn't come across like that, they were talking about clothes and about the colour of each others clothes and nothing else.*
> (RD)

Meaningful conversation which takes place informally and with direct reference to the issues raised by young people in an everyday environment is the central motor for the development of educational opportunities of both an unstructured and structured kind in successful work observed in the research. Yet this is also that feature which is most hidden in the margins, the unprogrammed and the boundary spaces of youth work.

Chapter 8:

Communicating in Public

Youth workers are worth their weight in gold. We work unsociable hours to meet young people's needs. So we're not selfish people. We are patient and mild mannered. And we love what we do. I think you have to love what you do to work in this field. So maybe a lot less criticism and a lot more help and we can maybe all help the community to work together. I think it does, I like that saying it takes a village to raise a child, it takes everybody to make a difference. You can't just put it on one person's shoulders. So again like we work with the residents and we work with the police, if everybody was to take a positive interest I think the world would be a much nicer place to tell you the truth.
(DD -youth worker)

8.1 The range of youth work

Although the work of youth projects is generally conceptualized primarily in terms of face-to-face work with young people, there are various constituencies of adults who have an interest or an investment in what youth work does and in what it achieves. These range from the families of the young people, management committee members and organizational managers, the residents of local communities, local politicians and fellow professionals working with young people in the same area. Outside the everyday, these constituencies tend to be more abstract. Projects encounter representatives of other agencies such as funding bodies, national politicians and the executive members of national organizations only on an occasional and irregular basis. Between 'the everyday' and 'the abstract' are those whose interest becomes manifest in the longer life-cycle such as inspectors and auditors, or those who attend annual general meetings. Beyond all these is 'the public' – a largely imaginary constituency which might occasionally be represented by images of and debates about young people in the media.

During the course of the research a number of encounters between youth workers and other adults representing different interest groups were recorded. Sometimes these involved no active communication between the adults concerned, such as when youth workers observed but did not intervene in situations involving young people and police or teachers, although the workers might glean from the young people an account of 'what was going on' at a later stage. At other times there was formal and standardized communication such as in the need to gain parental

approval for activities. At the opposite extreme some contact was entirely informal, such as when youth workers chatted with each other and whoever else was present after an event. Co-working with fellow professionals from other services offered opportunities for different types of conversation from the formal, task oriented, to the informal, friendly exchange of information and understanding which might oil the wheels of actual practice.

Youth workers discussed their understanding of the role of other adults with the researchers. Within the directed data there are anecdotes which related to real encounters and conversations. There are also reflections about the position of the youth worker in the matrix of adult relationships associated with the practice environment. In these reflections, some youth workers characterized their position as one 'between' young people and other adults. They thought of themselves as a link or a bridge between two separate worlds and their role as facilitating constructive communication and understanding, interpreting different perspectives and ameliorating potential or real conflict. In so doing, they believed that it was their responsibility to communicate to young people a version of adulthood which was different from that normally experienced or expected by young people from adults in public life. This was exemplified in their willingness to listen to young people and to treat them seriously as well as their preparedness to participate in adventurous and challenging activities alongside them. It involved presenting themselves as a positive adult role model:

> *Just to help them maybe understand society and be the adult link that they don't have and show them that not all adults are bad.*
> (DD)

8.2 Relating to other adults

Whilst adopting such a role has positive and constructive intent, it does also carry with it difficulties in the positioning of youth work vis à vis other professionals. Firstly, the projection of the positive and distinctive attributes of the youth work approach imply a negative criticism of other professional interventions, even when youth workers do not actually intend this. Secondly, there is tension in the expectation of youth workers that they can play a role which is defined against other professionals and simultaneously be welcomed as a trusted colleague by these professionals. Thirdly, the role of mediator, if not entirely contradictory, does not sit easily with that of advocate for young people. The management of such inherently non-complementary positions requires great skill which perhaps can only be learned through experience. This helps to explain why sometimes youth workers are frustrated in their efforts to exert influence and why some do not make much contact with adults outside their own domain:

> *The female worker commented how it is funny that they seem to know all the young people in the area and not really any of the adults. They have friendly relationships with the young people but rarely even make eye contact with the adults.*
> (RD)

Most youth workers are keenly aware that even though they might make a contribution

to effective communication between the generations and especially in relation to formal institutions, in sympathizing with the perspective of young people who are characterized as excluded or disaffected, they risk powerlessness themselves:

> *In terms of working with young people our values are probably quite unique as youth workers, when it comes to working in partnership with other statutory or more formal groups there's tension then, because it's usually around values, about how they think you should work with young people and how we work with young people.*
> (FG – youth worker)

> *People don't think of youth workers as professional. I think youth workers think of each other as professional but you just have to see what it's like when you go to another meeting, you'll say I'm a youth worker, it doesn't carry much weight. You're better off just saying I work for [the council], I work for Education. If you try to go in too much detail people will like, oh he's a youth worker, they don't take you too seriously...*
> *(DD – youth worker)*

> *You're always going to be seen as an outsider. I think that's one of the things that you come to understand when you come in to do the type of work that we do.*
> (DD – youth worker)

The status of the youth worker in the eyes of other adults is not only related to their identification with the powerlessness of young people, but also to what is most apparent in their work even to a casual observer. When reflecting upon the perceptions of other adults, youth workers frequently referred to its apparently casual nature, something more akin to recreation than to skilled work.

> *Members of my family... say, 'Do you call this work?' They think, you're up there and you've got about forty or fifty young people, and they might be playing music and doing things that they do in youth work and you might have a discussion group going on around racism or sexism or bullying in school or something going on in another little room. And I think a lot of normal people, ordinary people, can't get their head around what we do. I mean that's my experience over the years.*
> (DD – youth worker)

> *People think youth workers are somebody who stands around a pool table and just watch. I think years ago maybe that's what did happen but people don't understand. Even my husband didn't understand the kind of work I do until I got right into youth work. And I think it's about selling ourselves really because everyone else is jumping on the band wagon, like Connexions and other agencies coming in and they're doing a job that youth workers have done for years just with a new label.*
> (DD – youth worker)

8.3 External perceptions

If the youth worker's job is perceived merely as 'recreation', then its legitimacy can be gained only from its effectiveness as a form of social control of young people. Youth workers believe that their work is most commonly understood by outsiders, and to some degree by young people themselves, as recreation – control and that few really understand what their work is about.

> *Local people, some other professionals, even family members, they'll say 'Well it keeps them off the streets, doesn't it?' I say, 'Well I'm a detached worker on the streets!' There are other professionals from other organisations who think that we're there to visit and work in areas where there's high levels of crime. I don't know if they think that we can just talk people down from being on the borderline or involved in crime, such as petty stuff like vandalism, graffiti, anti social behaviour [laughs] which is crime, crime, crime. Or even sort of aggressive behaviour where there'll be a bit of territorial violence between groups etc. Or even fall-outs between friends and partners which may lead to one hurting the other. People think that we're going to be able to solve that. These are people from other professions, some close to home, some not so close to home.*
> (DD)

> *I think it needs to be recognised at the top...It's about understanding what we do, people really understanding. 'Well you just stand and play table tennis and pool,' 'Erm. No.' And people who've been around and involved in youth projects for years and years, they're drawing their pensions now, they've been on management committees and they still think that's what youth work's about.*
> (DD)

> *You could ask me now what each department does and I know what housing does, social services, the education service, I know all these things. But if you went to the same people and asked them what do youth workers do like I said to you before they'll just say oh well they try to keep kids off the street and play games and that's it. And that's just one tiny piece of our work.*
> (DD)

An understanding of youth work which is framed entirely within a model of recreation – control, does not perceive that there is any skill involved in the work beyond organizing and participating in activities and controlling space. This contributes to an idea that maybe 'anybody can do it':

> *Some parents had thought that the project should be open, Friday Saturday and Sunday evenings (in order to prevent the drug problems!). The worker agreed to go down and open the building and support a group of the parents in running the project. It ran for about three weeks until there was a problem. A man came in with a gun, the worker dealt with the issue, but this scared the parents off and the project didn't open over the weekend anymore.*
> (RD)

Misunderstanding about their activities and purposes in these terms is an everyday experience

for youth workers which was not only communicated directly but also observed in the course of the research. For example, at a meeting with residents of a local estate:

> *Workers had to stress again that it would not be their job to come along and move young people on. One private resident said that it would be better for the detached workers to work the early hours of the morning, they are not really needed at the time they do the detached work as there aren't many problems at that time. The worker said that they already work extended hours until 11pm on Friday and 10pm on Saturday nights and they would not be able to fund positions to work at that time*
> (RD - residents' meeting)

At another, local partnership meeting focusing on 'Problem Solving', the research diary records the focus upon young people as the source and cause of many local 'problems' and although there was some understanding in this meeting of the boundaries of the youth worker role, nevertheless:

> *They talked about needing to identify young people and asked the manager if the detached workers could give any names of young people in the area.*
> (RD)

The attendance of youth workers at meetings entitled 'Problem Solving' or 'Crime Forum' seems to endorse the view that this is a central feature of their practice. Here youth workers, like others who work with young people, are inevitably constrained to be positive participants in partnership organizations constructed within the dominant discourse of 'young people as problem.'

> *In attendance were: project manager, two young women on placement, male head master, male manager from local football club, female educational welfare worker, male town council member (chair), male police officer, female year 11 pupil from student council...People fed back any information they had on certain areas, things that had been going on, any reports or concerns. Again it did seem to be very young people focused, not necessarily negative but taken for granted that all disorder or anti social behaviour would be from young people.*
> (RD)

To be formally acknowledged as professional workers demands that youth workers participate in partnership meetings of this nature. However, such meetings are mainly constructed in relation to policy initiatives which are concerned with 'issues' and 'problems' associated with young people and as such, the terms of reference and discussion are reactive in these terms. Within this there is no space for discussion which questions the premise of the meeting or the terms in which co-operation is perceived. Even were the professional identity and purposes of youth work not misunderstood, in these circumstances there is simply no space for an articulation of an informal educational perspective which is not related to the agenda of control. Youth workers thus find themselves in communication with other relevant adults, colluding in an articulation of their professional responsibilities which invert their self-definition. From their own perspective, informal educational processes do indeed make a contribution to solving

problems associated with young people, but this outcome is dependent upon them not identifying young people as a problem in the first place. Their professional identity is therefore compromised in the public sphere. Not surprisingly therefore, youth workers consider themselves to be misunderstood by others and find themselves having to constantly reiterate what it is that they do and what are the limits of their role:

> *Speaking of the different types of work I do and particularly around the detached work, the curfews and ASBOs and things like that, each time we go out we're really having to think about what we're doing and reiterate that we're youth workers, we're not social controllers. Because there's a lot of people that, there's a lot of funding that's going around the community safety agenda and they're trying to, if you go down that you can get the funding for it but that's not what youth work's about. And I still think that a lot of people misunderstand that. Although we could do that and get the money easy it's not really what we're about...A piece of work what we did, it was a curfew, one of the first in the country... and they were saying, 'Could you do anything in the area?' And I said, 'You've got to remember that we're youth workers. And if you want instant response and end result get the police in there, get the street wardens in there, to clamp down on it. But if you want quality and longer term results then you've got to give us at least 6 months to develop the youth work. And let the outcomes of it be the results rather than us going in there and saying "Right we're going to reduce crime!" What we'll do is work with the young people and then hopefully the effects of the work will then reduce anti-social behaviour in the area. But that's not our target. That will be an outcome, we know that, but it's not our direct target. It's about working with the young people but you've got to allow us.' And because we've got a little bit of a track record of us having an effect indirectly on the reduction of anti-social behaviour and crime in general is that they sort of went with that. But that's youth workers who particularly need to be sticking to their guns rather than penny chasing which is easy to do under that banner.*
> (DD)

These difficulties are exacerbated by the actual positioning of youth work with reference to the other professions. The apparent ability of youth workers to communicate effectively with 'difficult' young people who are otherwise problematic, encourages a formal acknowledgement of the benefits of youth work methods without any necessary corresponding attention to the significance of values, purposes and underlying philosophy. The usefulness of youth work in these terms is judged instrumentally in terms of the contribution to the success of related agencies and according to a shifting range of criteria - including crime reduction, improved school attendance, reduction in teenage pregnancy, or increased participation of young people in training and employment.

Because funding is also to be found in relation to such matters, youth projects do adopt positions which are relative to the work of other agencies, and which in some ways can be seen simply as 'servicing' other professional approaches, acting as a 'mediator' between young people and other social institutions or being presented as a 'treat' for good behaviour. This requires youth workers to be sensitive to the perspectives and values of other agencies without this being necessarily reciprocated:

Danny: *One of the other factors that can end up having some impact- like today is a classic example. For us, working with kids that are in an alternative education programme, what was going on in school with their teachers today meant that we couldn't work with them although we were supposed to be working with them today. The nature of that relationship meant that it wasn't going to be possible to work with them today.*

Sharon: *Even though we are separate. We go there every Wednesday, the teacher pulled the plug today because of their behaviour before we arrived. They had control, basically, the school still had control, even though we go in and work separately with them, they are trying to link the two together, and it can be the same as well when we're working with some children's homes. If the kids have done something wrong then they treat us like a treat, 'You can't go to [the project] 'cos you've been bad.' So it's a bit annoying because you don't get to do what you are supposed to be doing with them. You know you're like an add on, or a secondary thing, not the real meat and bones of their education.*
(FG – youth workers)

8.4 Speaking across boundaries

In attempting to work satisfactorily with external adults in the interests of young people, youth workers need to be adaptive and flexible, learning to speak appropriate 'languages' in different contexts. Mediation is a necessary function of youth work, but again, not without its problems. Firstly insofar as it assumes and responds to the reality of conflict between young people and other interest groups youth workers are allocated the task of 'sorting out problems' between young people and other agencies on behalf of the agency. This fails to acknowledge the centrality of the young person to the youth work approach, demanding rather that youth work 'delivers' for the agency. If this is not achieved, youth work can be perceived as failing. This can set the youth worker on a course for friction with adults occupying positions of power:

That's another thing that we need to be aware of, we're always going to do or say something that people don't agree with or that upsets somebody. And these might be people in positions of power. And it's what the outcome's going to be for us further down the line, such as people's willingness to be involved – they can take that willingness away. Because we'd said something that they didn't agree with, they may be too busy to get involved with us further down the line. Whereas if we just smiled and pretended that everything was alright and gone along with what they said and not challenged it in any way we'd still have contact on a regular scale
(DD – youth worker)

Secondly, the mediation role, undertaken from a position of relative powerlessness vis à vis other agencies such as police, and representing young people who have low status in public decision making, always pushes youth workers into dialogue in which they do not set the terms of reference. Such secondary positioning is formalized in legal structures which in reality accord greater powers to other professionals and their work. This sometimes causes youth workers to withdraw or to remain outside situations where they believe they do not have the power to

affect the outcome:

> *He gave an example of the tensions sometimes felt from being a youth worker in a school. He was walking across the school field one day when he saw a teacher talking to some young lads he knew. As he approached he saw that the teacher was shouting at them to get off the premises. They began to walk away and then saw the youth worker so they stopped and had a chat to catch up. The teacher approached them again and started shouting at them which got their backs up as they said they were only talking and catching up. The teacher then said something to the worker, the worker decided to just walk away as the situation was bad enough.*
> (RD - discussion with worker)

The secondary positioning and the contradictory dimensions of the expectations of youth workers within the institutional matrix means that their communication with other significant adults can be diversionary, undermining and unfulfilling in terms of their own intentions. The effect of this has been largely to convince youth workers that they are 'misunderstood' outside their own professional enclaves. This has two main consequences.

Firstly, it makes youth workers think that they must be constantly finding ways to communicate the meaning of their work in terms which will be understood by others. They become adept at interpreting the terms of reference of outsiders and responding in terms which make sense from the perspective of the other. This might be effective in facilitating conflict-free communication and encouraging trust, but it is also performative and does nothing to affirm the central professional values of youth work. Rather, it entrenches its secondary status and undermines the potential of youth work to develop a stronger professional discourse of its own.

Secondly, it leads to distorted analyses. When youth workers begin by believing that their work cannot be understood by other adults, they then blame unsympathetic decisions and actions by outsiders on this misunderstanding. This is particularly the case in relation to the 'abstract' others who inhabit positions of power, such as national politicians. Practitioners continue to believe optimistically that they are being pushed into difficult and contradictory positions without any reward in enhanced status or recognition because of 'lack of understanding'. The answer then must be to be more assertive about their values:

> *As youth workers, yeah we've got to look at our values. Then our bosses have got to look at the value of youth work and share that with whoever's the big boss in the sky who's valuing youth work and understanding it. It would be good if we did have a youth worker up there. Somebody who's done a lot of face-to-face work, who understands it, who doesn't mind going back out there and working in a couple of youth centres around the country, just to get a feel.*
> (DD - youth worker)

Unfortunately, the circumstances being visited upon youth workers make it increasingly difficult to look at and assert their own values within professional discourses concerned with young people and there is very little evidence to suggest that managers or politicians really do not understand youth work. Rather it appears that youth work in its own terms is irrelevant to the

new directions of policy. Its invisibility is structural.

8.5 Encouraging understanding

Yet despite the difficulties some evidence from the research suggests that when youth workers pro-actively pursue clear objectives in their own terms, when the initiative for partnership working comes from their own work rather than being policy-driven, they are able to create constructive relationships which accords them a position of respect and which works to the benefit of all involved.

> *I mean even on – like an anti-social behaviour aspect, the police said to me last summer (we'd done some paint balling with the police. We try and do that every summer. We organise the young people against the police for the paint balling) and they've said, when they speak to some of them on the streets now they're like, 'Oh you're the one I shot!' And they're not as aggressive. So the police are finding it easier to communicate with the young people because they recognize them. So when they're drinking their bottle of Lambrini or whatever on the street, they're just taking it off them and they're having a bit banter, and they know that the police are just doing their job. So the police have actually said that it has helped to break down the barriers a little bit with them getting involved. I mean you're obviously still going to have the young people who are abusive to them but its trying to break those barriers down a little bit with them.*
> (DD – youth worker)

Sometimes work which is mutually understood and mutually beneficial can be undertaken directly within the terms of policy. So for instance, in one project working educationally with young mothers, the workers were aware of the difficulties of presenting the values of youth work and yet they still managed to develop constructive working relationships with related professionals without compromising their own integrity:

> Researcher: *Do you think that, we've used the term outside world, but people who aren't involved in delivering youth work, do you think people understand what youth work is and what it's about in your experience?*
>
> Jane: *A lot of people don't, I don't think.*
>
> Mary: *Well in terms of some of the agencies that come into the project such as the midwives and health visitors obviously they have their own specialism but I think they do understand the type of work that we do.*
> *(DD – youth workers)*

Similarly, in this project, the workers believed that some funding agencies were also sympathetic to and understood the value of their approach to work with young mothers:

> Researcher: *So in some ways do you think that the work is being valued by some of the*

funders then?

Jane: *Definitely. Especially Children in Need. We're targeting the young mothers but then the children, the babies are getting a quality experience as well from a very early age. They're mixing with other children. And they don't just go in a crèche, our crèche workers have an educational programme depending on the age of the children so they're having musical experiences, they're having stories, they're having water play. So they're developing from it at a very early stage as well. The mothers are getting happy. They're feeling valued and feeling like their life's worthwhile and they're suddenly gaining aspirations, 'God yeah, I can do that. You know I've got my literacy and numeracy exams, I've got my food hygiene, I've got my health and safety. God I've got first aid now. I've got nationally recognised qualifications I can go to college now!' So they really start to feel valued. And Children in Need recognise that work, they want to see it. And they've funded us again, so we've had six years.*

Mary: *And a lot of money over six years.*

Jane: *That's right that's six years' worth. So I think that says that funders do value the work.* (DD – youth workers)

Of course the benefits of undertaking specialist work such as that with young mothers are not only that it can be easily categorized within a particular policy agenda, but also that the anticipated outcomes can be clearly delineated without compromising the quality or values of the youth work component. This is more problematic within generic youth work where the diffuse nature of 'exclusion' or 'disaffection' can cover a range of different objectives with reference to different young people. It is partly because generic youth workers are spread so thinly in relation to the range of different issues which they confront in practice that they are forced to speak in so many different languages to so many other professionals. However, specialization in itself cannot resolve this problem. For it is the generic approach which particularly attracts to youth work those young people who have non-specific difficulties with other social institutions and authority.

It is generic youth workers who are most likely to be in positions where they must communicate with a range of different adults with different expectations of their interventions with young people. Without the benefit of a clear 'specialist' language of their own, youth workers in these situations are dealing with the specialisms of other professionals, or the role specific circumstances of other adults such as parents or local residents.

The data suggests that it is in direct informal conversation with other adults that youth workers are best able to communicate their own values and the benefits of their work. In circumstances where the practice environment is becoming increasingly formalized, they are disadvantaged unless they themselves take responsibility for initiating the contact with others. Where youth workers actively sought the involvement of adults with a personal or professional interest in the work, they were usually rewarded with positive results:

Worker: *I've spoke to a lot of parents since I've worked for [this project] because I try to get a*

lot of parents involved as well. And a few of them have even commented to me, 'I didn't realise you did things like that. I was telling our such and such that they should get their little boy, girl involved with [the project] because you've done -' and I've had several thank you cards over the years from different parents. But what I try to do as well once I get to know the parents I'll tell them what the young person's been doing, sort of activity or, because sometimes the kids don't tell the parents. And I'll also invite the parents to awards evenings.

Researcher: *Like the football thing*

Worker: *Yeah the football tournament. So they know what the youth service do, like the kids aren't just coming to the youth centre and playing pool and chilling with the mates, that they're getting involved in things like the youth parliament, doing stuff for the PCT, things that they can be proud of you know*
(DD – project manager)

There is some indication in the data that youth workers tend to situate their work either with primary reference to local families and communities or with primary reference to the local network of professional services for young people and to take their professional identity partly from this positioning. When the reference point was the locality, they were much more able to construct active and positive relationships with parents and other community members. The knock-on effect of this could be sympathetic and supportive management committees who cushioned them against the dilemmas of their relationships with other professional services:

If you've got a good strong management committee who believe in you as a person, and as a worker you've got a good strong team around you, you can achieve everything's what expected to be achieved without falling into line and ticking the right boxes for other people.
(DD – youth worker)

On the other hand, when the primary reference point was more formal, workers had more difficulty in establishing the validity of their work with local people, were more likely to define families and local activists in negative terms and to see themselves as offering an 'alternative' to the everyday lives of young people:

It was highlighted that many of the young people are drinking on the streets and it is often the parents who provide the alcohol for them. This was difficult for workers to combat

The worker told a story about a young person who was in trouble at school for swearing. The mother was asked to come in and was seen leaving with the young person, batting them round the head saying, 'Swearing! I'll give you fucking swearing!' This [was told to illustrate] the small influence youth workers can have in family situations, where young people may be going home to no food, and constant yelling...
(RD)

There are clearly advantages, difficulties and consequences associated with either orientation. In one of the projects who participated in the research, the worker, appointed by a statutory service

to work with the local Bangladeshi community was caught between community identification and professional values. He was actively attempting to square a professional circle, using his own personal and professional identity, to take young people beyond what he perceived to be the limits of their cultural expectations on the one hand, whilst affirming their identity on the other.

Despite the pressure involved in adopting a position which seeks to integrate informal community and formal professional interests, the data suggests that managing to communicate on both the community and the professional front brings greatest satisfaction and the best outcomes from the work:

> *Sometimes I mean sometimes you are rewarded. I mean to be honest there's more good than bad. You have your moments where people will put on you and other agencies will put on you and you're doing a lot of work and they'll take all the credit. I mean the majority of the time you are rewarded. When the parents thank you and when the young people come back that's enough for me really. When people, say like the police were in the other day they said the football tournament was great, thanks for the certificates, when's the next one, the Inspector of police, just an example from last week. And I thought oh the police have really enjoyed it, the young people enjoyed it so I'll do another one and with him thanking me and asking for another one that sort of motivated me again to organise another football tournament, so yeah it is rewarding.*
> (DD – youth worker)

This suggests that youth workers need to look outwards from their primary contact with young people and actively seek informal dialogue with the whole range of adults who have an interest in the work rather than categorise them as abstract groups 'who don't understand' or who have a 'negative influence.' In making such a suggestion, it is apparent that the level of resources in youth work is hardly sufficient for such a task. Single worker posts are exceptionally problematic.

> Researcher: *What do you think that you need in order to work successfully with young people?*
>
> Tariq: *You don't need much really but what you do need is you need to make sure that you've got the support and backing to do it. Sometimes it's not good to be alone and what I find with [this council] in particular is that a lot of the workers are alone. [The project] downstairs we've got [the project manager] on his own all day, me by myself up here, having to deal with a lot of things, going out into people's homes on my own. I don't think 100% safe sometimes, obviously I'm more than confident to do it but I'm just imagining it not being like that for other people you know not everyone is like me. And I just think that you need more support from other people to realise how valuable it is what we do and to give us the finances and staff to do it, rather than just say here's a project... you're responsible for everything, it's a hard thing to give one worker.*
>
> Researcher: *It's like the widest remit*
>
> Tariq: *And like I say its not just youth work is it we're youth and community workers. So*

basically they're saying there's your project and you're responsible for working with everybody. It's impossible to do alone, so a bit more support from the people that matter, you know, higher up people in the council. And they need to realise how important their youth services are and plough a bit more into it
(DD – youth worker)

Recognising the range of contacts amongst adults as well as young people which youth workers must pursue must be a necessary precursor to requesting improved resources.

The importance of the development of adequate communication processes which integrate youth worker, young people, local people and other professionals can perhaps best be exemplified by the story told to the researchers by one worker:

I think youth workers do a lot and it needs to recognised. Like the case with [the detached worker] and the young people who done the murder and stuff. I mean it was the youth workers who came up with most of the information. How did the police come down on them? The young people came and told the youth workers who it was and what happened and how it happened. The police couldn't get this information ...

But after we had a lot of young people come in here and say 'He done it. He done it, I was there,' and they're describing to us the fight and actually at that time as well we had a big meeting about should we go and tell the police. Because some of the young people who told us this they told us it as something confidential. Not something that we'd go and tell the police. Because then the police will want to know the young person who told us and then if that's made public then the guy would probably come after them and they were scared. So they were the kind of situations we were in.
(DD – youth worker)

The importance of recognising the professional role of the youth worker and the specific ethical dilemmas of youth work can hardly be over-estimated in relation to such situations. In order to situate youth workers securely within a professional network of trust, it is crucial that the values and meaning of youth work are communicated effectively to others in the public domain. Ultimately, only youth workers themselves can do this.

Chapter 9:

Addressing Social Exclusion

It's basically about being included. It's about making you feel like you are someone.
(DD - young woman)

9.1 The integration of social exclusion

Addressing issues associated with social exclusion is integral to youth work practice at a number of levels and across a range of issues. At its broadest youth work offers compensatory opportunities for young people whose lives are constrained by the difficulties of their local and personal circumstances. At its most specific, it specialises in targeting particular 'issues' such as homelessness, sexual health, young motherhood, disability, school exclusion and access to employment.

Although youth work has always addressed such matters, the practice has not always been described in terms derived from the discourse of social exclusion. This has been a relatively recent development following the specific youth concerns highlighted by the SEU. The terminology of inclusion and exclusion has been adopted in response to policy directives as youth workers have inevitably sought funding and legitimacy in terms of the objectives of government. Social exclusion was a significant reference point for all the projects who participated in the research although there were different and overlapping priorities within this. Different aspects of the social exclusion agenda in projects included age related, social structural, institutional and equality-based perspectives.

9.2 Age-related exclusion

The starting point for all youth work is the acknowledgement that young people occupy a marginal social position because of their age. This legitimates a broad and universal approach to providing services to young people who are excluded or 'have issues' simply because they are young:

> *They're all quite socially adept young people but again they're still adolescents. They still have the same issues and concerns as other people its just sometimes they appear to be able to manage them better...They've had their fair share of issues*
> (DD - youth worker)

A major feature of the narratives of both young people and youth workers relates to exclusionary processes regarding young people and social space.

Youth facilities were appreciated by young people primarily as an unambiguous, youth dominated public space, which provided some sanctuary from the negative meanings and anxieties associated with their use of 'the streets.' The poverty of the in some localities was graphically illustrated by the photographs which some took in the course of the research (Appendix 1). Sometimes local streets, waste ground and take-away shops and garages are the only places where young people can socialise but when they congregate in such places their presence is frequently experienced as a threat to social order. In this regard, the social exclusion and the social control of youth become directly associated (Levitas,1998).

Some young people were highly sensitive about the way in which others experience their presence in public spaces:

> Dave: *...you know old people, there's lots of old people who are scared of young kids.*
>
> Alex: *Yeah. Say you're standing inside a shop and you're doing no harm, you've bought something so you're just standing there, and there's old people, they feel frightened because you see on the news all the time old people get mugged.*
>
> Dave: *And I even saw an old man carrying loads of shopping and I felt like, 'Oh I'll go and see if he needs a hand,' but he might think I'm going to try and do something, and so you don't...in case they feel intimidated. Because they will. Because they might have had bad experiences.*
>
> Alex: *Because people, there's a reputation for [this area], because people think they're all bad, there's no good*
> (DD – young people)

They were also aware that adult anxieties were not only a response to representations of youth, but also that the streets were in reality sometimes not safe for or from young people. As one young man explained:

> *I've been going to youth clubs all my life and I've seen the difference that they make. And as a kid... I don't know where I'd have been without my youth clubs back then. I used to go to one after school every day, sometimes on weekends. If I didn't have the youth club during the summer holidays, my God, I probably would have been out there... smashing cars and things because there's absolutely nothing for us to do apart from these youth clubs. And you can go to the cinema now and then, but that costs a lot of money. I don't really come from the background where I can ask for a lot of money whenever I want, to do whatever I want. We don't always go on holiday every year so the youth club was a very important part of my life.*
> (DD – young man)

Universally accessible youth facilities, in themselves make a contribution to addressing the exclusion of young people from opportunities for leisure and association. In the process, they are

also making a contribution to community safety. They are particularly valuable for young people who belong to families with low income and in circumstances where there is little opportunity to access commercial provision. It is primarily in terms of the opportunities to access age-related space with their peer groups that young people are attracted to generic youth provision in resource-poor areas and it is because of the more general deprivation of such areas that generic youth facilities have traditionally been located there.

9.3 Social structural exclusion

The question of age-related exclusion permeates the approach of youth work to all other issues. Despite the pathological element of this narrative associated with adolescent development problems, environmental issues predominate. As well as the general problem of social space for the young, youth workers are particularly alert to the fact that poor environments are related to other issues of social deprivation which affect all age groups. Thus the local and social identities and struggles of young people are perceived in relation to their family and community backgrounds. Priorities for intervention are responsive to local circumstances. For example, in isolated rural settings the work is concerned about transport and about opportunities for young people to meet others outside their immediate locality; in post-industrial areas, the work is concerned about the impact of poverty on young people; in Northern Ireland the work is sensitive to the consequences of the history of community conflict.

In the policy discourse social exclusion is multidimensional, often involving a complex network of interconnected problems. The concept is described as a shorthand term for 'what happens when people and areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown' (SEU, 2001).

There was evidence in the research of youth workers addressing all these problems as features of their practice but there was some anxiety amongst workers about the extent to which they could be expected to 'solve' such problems:

> *But then that's the agenda of the government and we're working on their agenda, not the young person's agenda. I'm sorry but, we as youth workers can not prevent - you know, we can educate young people on sexual health but we can't prevent them from getting pregnant, that's their own choice and consequences...How are we going to prevent this? How are we going to give young people the skills to go into employment?*
> (FG - youth workers)

Even when projects are targeted at particular social structural issues, the perspective of youth work is to acknowledge, attempt to understand and bring those issues to consciousness through informal educational approaches rather than attempt to directly and instrumentally seek solutions. Youth provision offers young people respite from problems associated with social exclusion; it provides opportunities for undertaking activities which would otherwise not be possible because of the restrictions created by exclusion; and it creates opportunities for young

people to gain the personal and social skills necessary for addressing the complex effects of exclusion. This is a diffuse approach to issues which might be targeted, and also one which recognises youth work as only one influence in a wider environment. Whilst workers confidently claimed that they could work across a range of issues, they were also keen to stress the limits of their power and influence with regard to the social structural features of social exclusion:

> *I think youth workers are the only professionals at the minute that really accept young people for what they are... it's now legitimate to scapegoat young people for all the woes of communities. Nobody's looking at the real reasons why communities experience problems and I think the real underlying problem is poverty...And I mean some of the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes are absolutely ludicrous as far as I'm concerned. Like one of them is 'achieve economic well-being;' not live in a low income household. We're youth workers, we're not government! We're not going to redistribute wealth; that's the government's responsibility. And that is what the problem is.*
> (DD – youth worker)

Meanwhile, the positive approach of youth work is held consistently against an overall deficit model inscribed in the policy discourse of social exclusion:

> *It's seeing the potential in them. You don't want to give up on them and you know for a fact that they've given up and other people have given up and it's motivating them and saying, ' You've got something there kidda!'*
> (DD – detached worker)

Time and again, youth workers stressed that a central value in their approach lay in treating the young people as people rather than as problems. Maintaining this holistic perspective is not easy in a climate in which funding and evaluation are related via the social inclusion agenda, to social problems and problem-solving. One worker gave an example of encouraging young people to participate in completing a funding application for a residential. The application asked questions about deprivation and poverty in relation to the area where the young people lived which surprised them because they did not define themselves in these terms. Youth workers thus find themselves promoting their practice in terms of social exclusion whilst shielding young people from the denigration involved in the associated labelling:

> *You have this huge stream of anti-social behaviour money and to access that you literally have to identify every young person that walks through the door as a potential criminal or potentially liable to commit a crime. And unfortunately in order to secure that short term funding you bite the bullet. But you protect and shield the young people from that awareness.*
> (FG – youth workers)

There is a contradiction between the youth work response to social exclusion as an environmental question which contextualises and informs their approach, and the policy response in which the variously defined features of exclusion are targeted for specialist intervention. Within policy, it is the problem which is centred rather than the young person. As a response to policy imperatives, young people are more likely to be 'referred' than to make

voluntary contact, they are more likely to be understood with reference to deficiency rather than potential, and their needs are more likely to be defined according to negative relationships with other social institutions than in their own terms. The necessity of collaborating with such an approach inevitably drives at least part of youth work practice towards specialisms associated with policy priorities. In most cases, the consequences is that youth projects are divided both vertically and laterally between 'generic' and 'targeted' interventions. Some interventions are created entirely in response to issues of exclusion in which youth workers attempt to be vigilant about their key values. Other interventions are sustained on a generic basis and in them, youth workers attempt to draw out and prioritise issues of social exclusion both in reality and for purposes of representation. Maintaining the central principles and values of generic youth demands constant vigilance in these situations.

9.4 Institutional exclusion

Specialisation in youth work is aligned with the key themes identified as policy priorities for public expenditure. These include for instance, work with young mothers and with the homeless. Behind these themes, there is an overarching analysis which suggests that waged employment is the principal indicator of social inclusion. For young people, the possibility of gaining such employment is prefigured by full engagement with education and/or training (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001; Macrae et al, 2003). In the light of such analysis, young people identified as most at risk of long term social exclusion, are those defined as not in employment, education or training (NEET). Targeted work with young people is shaped by these considerations.

Because youth workers define themselves primarily as educators, it is in these terms that their work is most likely to be promoted in the network of services addressing exclusion in terms of NEET. Youth work can contribute to young people gaining some of the 'softer' and 'transferable' skills needed in the contemporary labour market, supplementing the work of schools and training organisations particularly for those young people who have difficulties in accessing or participating fully in mainstream institutions. Youth work in these terms is supported primarily as a compensatory approach to formal education and training.

Within the research sample, there were projects which were operating directly within the force-field of formal education, but mostly youth workers were co-operating with schools by helping to deal with difficult individuals or by delivering 'sessions,' additional to the formal curriculum, around subjects such as sexual health and drugs awareness. Some youth work was 'school-based' and physically located in the grounds of one school, some youth workers offered peer education and mentoring schemes within schools and youth centres, others maintained a role as support workers for young people who had difficulties with schooling. One project was involved in a pilot scheme with the central aim of facilitating the return to school of those young people who were excluded. At the face-to-face level, all youth work undertaken in co-operation with schools involved working with young people identified by teachers as 'challenging' or 'non achievers.'

Transforming Youth Work identified a distinctive contribution for youth work in accrediting the

achievements of young people outside formal education. This could have universal application to young people, offering opportunities for them to gain recognition for their personal endeavours and contributing to their CVs. In some situations it does indeed take this form. However, accreditation via youth work appears to offer a particular advantage in relation to those young people who do not succeed in school, who are identified as at risk in terms of the NEET definition, but who respond to youth work.

Aligning youth work with schooling and introducing accreditation as a formal objective has had significant consequences. Firstly it has led to an increased formalisation of the educational approach, expressed in the contested language of 'curriculum' (*Youth and Policy*, 84, 2004). This competes with informal education and threatens a shift towards methods which have traditionally been secondary rather than primary aspects of practice. For some workers accreditation is outside the distinctive approach of youth work:

> *The accreditation, the recorded outcomes, certification, its more curriculum based and I don't think that's what we're about.*
> (FG -youth workers)

> *There's a system there, it's called a formal system, that's where accreditation happens. That's where you get your NVQs, that's where you get all that. If young people want to go down that road there's a system there. Why enforce it on youth service?*
> (FG -youth workers)

Secondly, it implicitly situates youth work in a secondary position to formal education, training or employment in which it is easily assumed that the purpose of the youth work intervention is to service the formal institution and facilitate the (re) inclusion of the young person into the mainstream institution. This not only prevents youth work from evaluating its success in its own terms but at the same time might be counter-productive for the young people involved in unrealistically raising their expectations and hopes:

> *And the accreditation thing sometimes I'm frightened sometimes that we're setting young people up to fail. In some instances the accreditation is fantastic and I know for some it would be absolutely brilliant but ultimately some of the stuff that we do, what is it for? Is it going to lead to anything that is going to offer them employment, training and stuff?.*
> (FG – youth workers)

Thirdly it values a mechanistic and instrumental intervention over holistic values. This undermines the very process which makes youth work valuable as an addition to formal education in the first place, and might actually work towards excluding from youth work those young people who might benefit most from engagement:

> *We've got curriculum statements and headings. You've got to do it. 'Young people have a voice and young people have a choice.' Yeah! They've got a choice! They either come in and do education based work or they don't come in. Because some centres are not going to allow young people in if they're not going to be involved in the accreditation, because of the*

percentages. They'll say, 'Don't let them register, because they're not interested'...So what will happen is that young people who are not going to get involved in the accreditation are just going to get pushed out. Because it's the way youth work's going.
(DD - project manager)

For detached workers, who are meant to target difficult to reach, disengaged young people who are not attending school maybe and are not part of mainstream provision, they're the least likely to achieve an accredited outcome, right? So my fear is that perhaps you will get young people who perhaps don't need as much provision. They will be targeted because they're much more likely to achieve the accredited outcomes, recorded outcomes. And they're easier to work with, it's got to be said. And the ones who are really, really out of it they'll just get left because we've got this pressure on to perform and meet the targets
(DD - youth worker)

Finally a process which might be beneficial in itself, is subverted by the conflation of measures of achievement for young people with measures of organisational effectiveness. In a climate of limited funding and regular inspection and judgement in these terms, measures of organisational efficiency begin to take priority over the meaning of the engagement for the young people concerned in some circumstances:

Ray: *I think an important thing for me around accreditation ...there was a difference before where workers were recognising opportunities and getting young people accredited and stuff and I suppose to an extent I'm a product of that. I was a young person from this service and I've come through and ended up working for it but now there's a massive pressure to get accreditation done, it is a target. So you have to question the value of that accreditation where normally if there wasn't this pressure you might slot young people into certain pieces of accreditation because you know they're into it or you know its going to benefit them. Now there's this sheep herding thing ...*

Marco: *And in addition to that you've got very specific time frames as well for achieving the delivery. Whereas once upon a time probably when Ray went through that process his accredited learning could have gone on for two years within a particular area. Now that's quality youth work. That's somebody who's been sustained in a project, who's constantly participated, who's developing as an individual, who's contributing to the service's needs by informing them so his learning outcomes. I mean how would you do it in eight weeks? 'Name, date of birth, register. Right you paint that for me; lovely drawing, we'll put that on as a collage, mural. Well done! Accreditation! You are going to be an artist when you leave school!' (laughing)*
(FG - youth workers)

In principle, youth workers are neither against working co-operatively with fellow professionals in relation to young people's institutional exclusion, nor averse to introducing structured and accredited programmes into their practice. Moreover most believe that exclusion from education, training and/or employment is problematic in terms of the life chances of young people. They also accept that recognition for achievement is especially important to those young

people who are deprived of this elsewhere in their lives, even though there were questions about the inherent value of some certificates. Generally workers took upon themselves the responsibility of finding creative approaches to working with schools, with curriculum-based programmes and with predetermined outcomes and accreditation processes.

However, they experience a threat to their professional integrity in the ways in which they are currently required to do this. These processes run counter to what they perceive to be the main objectives of their professional approach which involves exploiting opportunities which present themselves in everyday practice for building the self confidence of young people, enabling them to value their pre-existing skills and abilities as well as developing new ones, and encouraging them to explore different ways of 'achieving'. What is threatened by the response to NEET is their desire to hold onto the idea that it is needs as expressed by young people in the here and now which should be the starting point for the youth work intervention:

> *[It is] not always a need that has been identified by the young person. It's probably a need that has been identified by an adult. Supposedly the young person should be aware and should have an input on what's going on but when it comes from the school it is not always the case. But when they come over here we might say, 'OK, what area do you feel you might need to work on?' The school may identify 'behaviour', but that young person might feel there's nothing wrong with their behaviour but, ' I've got a really shitty life at the moment, which is having an impact on my behaviour', so there is the difference. We might be able to try and get to the base of the issue rather than the top layer.*
> (DD – youth worker)

In their own generic practice, youth workers become aware of the significance of a whole range of other issues related to exclusion which are associated with deep structural questions of power and equality. These influence the identities, the social behaviour and the well-being of young people in every aspect of their lives. Moreover, many youth workers are aware that some young people experience exclusion because of the ways in which power operates in the very institutions which are seen as essential to the ultimate achievement of social inclusion. In this case there are complex issues associated with working towards the goal of institutional inclusion. Their approach cannot be straightforwardly instrumental in these cases.

9.5 Equality-based exclusion

Structures of inequality and discrimination relating to age are a motivating concern of youth work, and the inequalities associated with class are integral to its practice field. However, other structures of inequality such as ethnicity, 'race', gender, disability and sexuality are of major significance to the identities, the experiences and the life chances of young people.

Concerns about these issues were voiced most consistently by specialist youth workers targeting particular constituencies such as young mothers, Bangladeshi, Jewish or LGBT young people. However, within mixed and generic youth work there were frequent references to exclusion as it related to prejudice, discrimination and structures of inequality in institutions. For many

workers, youth projects are self-consciously maintained both as safe places for all young people across difference and as places where young people could explore the significance of different identities:

> *Someone was very empowered with his sexuality when he was in here, totally LGBT. Out there! One of them that wanted to change the world. He wasn't the same man that I...met up the street that was totally shy and retiring.... Just because of the space that you make, allow somebody a different person. And even if it's just experimenting with that, that's fine. But that could be part of it as well, they can be themselves in a different place or they can be someone else. It allows them to experience and to access opportunities that they might not have available to them in another way.*
> (FG – youth workers)

Mainstream approaches include a wide range of different young people, and youth workers perceive their practice as inclusive and pro-active around difference and inequality. At the same time, they believe that such work could make a contribution to the social inclusion of young people in conventional terms relating to education and employment:

> *They were all 16 to 19, and a lot of these young people that came into the project they didn't care about education... Most of them were black and they thought that society didn't want them to do well, to achieve, especially here in this country. And my colleague, he was white himself and I was an Asian, and we became really close and our relationships developed as the year went by. And through this we used to show them programmes and documentaries and show them people like Nelson Mandela or Malcolm X or Martin Luther King and they used to see that these people were intellectuals in their own right...And I think that through these programmes, again it's the little bits of information feeding in, that they realised that maybe, yeah nobody is stopping me in this society to do well. Maybe it's just me that's stopping me and I really need to go out there and not care about what everybody else wants and do well. The programme ended because it was under funded... but ...some of the young people went to college at the end. A lot got themselves jobs and stuff like that. And it was a lot to do with the influence that they came here and they really started to think about these things. And they had completely different views from when they came to when they left. A lot of them had completely different view about society and people. So I think that's one piece of work that I was happy with.*
> (DD – youth worker)

Where difficulties were expressed in relation to such issues, it was mainly in terms of formal requirements rather than the principles of practice. So although workers are happy to work on equality issues and see this as part of their value-base, responding directly to Equal Opportunities Law could be problematic in their everyday circumstances:

> *We have to adhere to the Disability Act and I think the big response we're seeing is with people trying to put those things in place. But then it's about, have we got the adequate funding to do that? Because what's the cost of converting those centres? ...It's the same, there's a new amendment to the Race Relations Act and what we see is very little push towards that...We as*

a staff team can not focus on that because, well unless we can invent a 36 hour day, so there's just a mixture of things that we almost have to use our own tool boxes to get out of and to see how we're going to handle...it's taking away from my face-to-face contact with them so we're getting shorter in the time we can spend with young people as well.
(FG - youth workers)

Clearly, given the paucity of resources within generic youth work, it is impossible to meet all needs in all terms. Consequently youth work addressing social exclusion in terms of issues of power and equality is most often undertaken through workers accessing specialist funds. This in turn encourages a separate approach to working with particular groups of young people. There are significant advantages to separate, specialist work not least of these being that the young people involved can associate in safety with others who have had similar experiences and who have similar identities:

When you come everyone's in the same boat as well. You're all a bit low on confidence so when you meet someone in your group and things you're all sort of I don't know maybe sort of connect in that sort of way and understand about how each other might feel and things
(DD - young mother)

The feeling of safety often means having in place workers who can empathise, who might have similar identities or have had similar experiences to the young people involved. For example, one of the workers with young mothers talked about herself having been a mother at the age of sixteen. One worker in an LGBT projects thought it was important that he himself was gay and a Bangladeshi worker discussed the influence on him of his own experiences of racism directly in relation to institutional exclusion:

One significant thing that happened to me that made me focus on youth work was teachers at school and racism. I started to see it getting worse and what happened was, I used to get bullied a lot in school in my younger years and once I got involved in an incident... and I was excluded from school.
(DD - youth worker)

Workers with common identities to the young people can be particularly adept at dealing with issues which other workers might not recognise or understand. On the other hand this can be quite isolating as they find themselves having to address concerns which are outside mainstream practice. This might mean fighting even for the recognition of youth work itself:

They've said to me that the young people don't need nothing, they'll take care of them...To be honest with you they haven't got a clue about youth work.
(DD - youth worker).

Dealing with a set of issues specific to the situation and finding those issues outside mainstream agendas means that some workers dealing with structural inequality struggle to have their own voices heard and to be taken seriously. At the same time, it is possible that the level of identification between workers and young people in these circumstances can lead to such

a high level of personal commitment from the worker, that separating the personal from the professional can become difficult. Without clear structures, systems and supervisory mechanisms, such workers are sometimes forced to deal personally with ethical dilemmas in isolated situations.

When there are clear structures and well-managed organisational systems in place, youth workers dealing with specialist groups and equality issues can gain a great deal of freedom to pursue the work in terms which are meaningful to themselves and the young people. This is particularly the case if the work is responsive to a particular concern in the policy discourse - such as work with young mothers or with young Muslims and where funding is forthcoming for their initiatives. In one project working with young mothers, funded mainly from charitable sources, it was apparent that the work was young people centred, led by principles of informal education and voluntary association and responsive to everyday, presenting realities. At the same time, it operated in partnership with other services, accepted referrals, and delivered curriculum based learning with accredited outcomes. The young women talked about group association and support, reduced isolation and increased confidence through attending. They also achieved examination passes and accessed further educational opportunities as a result of their participation. This seemed to work well partly because of a self conscious maintenance by the workers of the central values of generic youth work within the conditions of the specialism and a set of organisational systems designed to deliver formal requirements in conjunction with informal processes. What appears crucial here is that self-consciousness about professional values, allied with skill in organisational management is carried in the persons of the workers who are trusted and allowed space in the wider organisational framework. Not all youth workers operate in such conditions.

9.6. Impact of the social exclusion agenda

There is much within youth work which can and does meet the desire of government to address questions of social exclusion. Youth projects are mainly situated in areas with high levels of deprivation where a range of issues impact negatively on young people both in terms of their age and as members of particular communities. It is clearly possible for youth work to respond to the issues raised by social inclusion policies in ways which are systematic and managed in partnership with other agencies. The evidence from the research is that youth workers are keen to make a contribution in these terms and that the young people do benefit accordingly, valuing the contribution which the youth agency makes to their circumstances and in recognising their achievements.

However, there are concerns across the board that the full potential of youth work is being inhibited by the way in which the social exclusion discourse fragments the approach of different services and situates youth work in a secondary position in relation to other institutions. This exacerbates the tendency to focus upon problems rather than people and in so doing is contradictory for youth workers. Youth work can continue to progress under such conditions, but it does so mainly through a combination of operating two systems - a generic system and a targeted system, and through the determination of youth workers to hold onto their values

in sometimes alien circumstances. When conditions are such that these values can be sustained without conflict, as was evident in a small minority of (specialist) projects included in the research, the youth work approach can consistently achieve in both its own terms and in terms of addressing social exclusion. The challenge is to remove the contradictions inhibiting generic practice.

Chapter 10:

Bureaucracy, Accountability and Evaluation

It's human change, if we actually boil it down, not just what youth workers do. It's about change isn't it? Showing that things have changed for the better,not the worse.
(FG - youth worker)

10.1 Entanglements

Throughout the research, youth workers engaged in animated discussions about questions of evaluation and accountability, usually with reference to the current conditions for measuring performance and in terms of their experience of competition for time between administration and face-to-face practice. Workers did not generally distinguish between the bureaucratic aspects of their work and the processes of evaluation. Nor did they conceptually separate evaluation as a tool for the assessment of young people, evaluation for profession development and evaluation for the purposes of accountability even though they used different processes in practice with varying degrees of efficiency. Conversation about these topics tended to slip from one area to another, and the language used to discuss this important area of practice was imprecise and often generalised simply as 'paperwork.'

It is apparent that these areas of responsibility are problematic in the everyday practice of youth work. Only a small minority of workers (three, in one project) appeared to be managing the growing demands from organisations for hard data without difficulty. The remainder responded to 'paperwork' with a combination of dismay, dissent, criticism and sometimes refusal. Mainly this was because they perceived it to threaten their face-to-face practice with young people. Even when the case for undertaking evaluation was presented as a means of improving the well-being of young people, most workers were cynical about the actual effect. The threat from paperwork was identified as absolute in the increasing amount of time needed to satisfy bureaucratic demands and as relative in relation to a perceived mismatch between the type of data required of them and the professional values of the youth work craft.

The experience of threat in absolute terms has a very real basis. Recent years have witnessed a sharp rise in the demands of the state and other funding bodies for measured evidence relating to the performance of youth workers and their impact upon young people (Catan, 2002; Smith, 2003). Transforming Youth Work explicitly linked improved funding for youth work with

accountability measured via evidence of recorded and accredited outcomes. This was initiated as an adjunct to the Connexions framework of personal development for young people in which an Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR) tool was used for purposes of assessing the needs and judging the progress of young people with, as Hoggarth and Payne (2006:51) suggest, ' a policy impetus to raise the number completed.' At the same time a wider network of policy initiatives which dovetail with youth work and the broader climate of evidence-based approaches to policy and practice (Catan, 2002; Issitt and Spence, 2004) have precipitated an enormous increase in time spent on systems of evaluation. These variously seek the views of young people in relation to their rights to be consulted and have a voice (eg. Youth Matters); assess changes in young people over specific periods of contact with agencies (eg. in response to 'Extending Opportunities and Raising Standards'), and assess young people who are perceived to be 'at risk' (eg. the Common Assessment Framework introduced in the wake of Every Child Matters). In addition to this there are also systems of self-evaluation and for measuring the professional development of youth workers themselves.

Youth workers understand and generally accept the argument that evaluation and assessment can aid systematic and effective practice. They also acknowledge the need to be accountable to funding bodies. However they are overwhelmed by the amount of data and form filling required, and dubious about the value and meaning of much of it in terms of their own approach to young people. So apart from the amount of time taken there is a relative threat which comes from the way in which paperwork seems to be subverting what they believe to be central to their practice:

> *We've got to focus more on hitting targets, getting accreditation so our time with the young people is actually getting twisted away from what youth work really should be about and we can't concentrate on that. And it's not going to be youth work in the long run. It's going to be some hybrid of something that could be really rotten, I can't criticise it 'til it happens, if it happens, but it sounds more and more like its turning that way. We're youth workers, we're meant to be working with young people – not filling out forms, doing paperwork and typing away at computers. It's more like an admin based thing now instead of actual youth work.* (DD – Youth worker)

The confusion in the language about the meaning of 'paperwork' is made even more complex in relation to organisational and managerial systems which are concerned with the formalities of maintaining a functioning service. In an increasingly litigious society, service organisations and insurance companies have become ever more risk-averse. Practitioners are required to conform rigorously, for example, to health and safety law and to ensure that they have undertaken risk-assessments and gained parental permission prior to engaging in any activity with young people.

Again, youth workers understand the importance of ensuring the safety of young people but they experience the bureaucratic details which result from a pre-meditated approach to risk in every situation to undermine the spontaneity of their practice. This is significant especially in relation to their efforts to be responsive to young people in the everyday setting:

> *One of the things I do worry about is that we're losing that flexibility because of the whole*

kind of way we're having to record. And we're having to do all the risk assessments and all that sort of stuff. We're becoming far more rigid in what we're doing, and safe. And I think our strength has always been our ability to be flexible and responsive in a planned and organised way.
(DD - project manager)

The resistance of youth workers to 'paperwork' is moderated by their understanding that administration, evaluation and accountability are necessary to the effectiveness, development and continued public support for their profession. In discussion they would often begin with an overview which was entirely negative and then as conversation developed their original position would be modified as they reflected upon purposes and necessities. The conversation between youth workers transcribed in Appendix 2 illustrates this process in practice. The initial response of outright rejection seems to reflect the absolutely negative experience of increased bureaucracy as an imposition on everyday practice, whilst the conditionality suggests that at an intellectual level, workers accept that there is a rational case for the introduction of new systems. In order to understand these responses, it is necessary to disentangle the actual impact from the principles and at the same time to consider separately the implications of bureaucracy, evaluation and accountability for youth work practice.

10.2 Bureaucracy

The impact of the amount of time spent in administering youth projects must be understood with reference to their size. There were some large organisations represented in the research sample, but at a local level of 'delivery' most projects were small, at least in terms of personnel, depending mainly upon one or two full time staff supplemented by part time and voluntary workers.

The bureaucracy falls disproportionately onto full time workers who usually attempt to protect the part time staff from paperwork in order to maximise the time they can spend with young people:

There were distinctions between the recording that is expected of full-timers and part-timers. Part timers do less evaluation, only writing up when something has happened.
(RD)

What I try to do with the paperwork and the part time staff is that I try to make it as - they need to do the evaluation form and that's what they need to do - but I give them a certain time to do those forms, so they're not taking them home with them, they're not spending huge amounts of time on them because... it takes away from the face-to-face work. But it needs to be done. That's just what you need to do unfortunately. I wish I didn't have to do it but I've got to do it.
(DD - project manager)

Full time workers carry the burden of paperwork relating to young people and to the

management of support staff, but they are also involved in the management of buildings, programmes, and interagency work. Not surprisingly, some of the full time workers involved in the research were designated as 'managers' in their job titles rather than as 'youth workers.' Despite this, such workers continued to interpret their professional role primarily with reference to face-to-face practice. Their personal and professional commitment, the focus of their time and energy, remained primarily to the young people but their formal designation suggested a primary role in relation to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation.

In the 'Janus-faced' practice which results for full time workers, there is a distinction between paperwork associated with the maintenance and development of face-to-face work and the paperwork linked to the demands and requirements of external bodies upon which the organisation depends for its continued existence. When workers perceive the demands of external powers to be contradictory to their practice orientation then the whole set of bureaucratic tasks including strategic planning, audit, evidence, assessment, targets and outcomes are experienced as an alien and unwarranted imposition. And such tasks are perceived as contradictory when they take time, already precious and stretched, away from face-to-face work. On the other hand, when paperwork is associated with planning an event which has arisen from the internal dynamics of practice, workers undertake such tasks efficiently and without complaint. Moreover, they frequently involve young people in such planning activities, passing on managerial and organisational skills in the process.

Youth workers resented the time taken by bureaucratic management partly because it impacted on the balance of their working day, partly because it intruded into their private time and most significantly, because lack of time to fill in important forms meant that they might not be completely properly and therefore might not fairly represent the practice.

There can be no doubt that their concerns about time are based in their real experience. Even when the workers admitted the positive value of paperwork, they mentioned its effect upon their time:

> *He showed me the evaluation pack for his project- there were hundreds of evaluation forms- they need four sheets per young person, plus overall summary data... The evaluation forms for the external evaluator are the forms that the youth worker finds most helpful- these are read through and then used as a basis for discussions*
> (RD)

> *I've never been a great lover of paperwork although I do see it as really valuable. It is really valuable for self-assessment, evaluation, monitoring, documenting, helping us keep track of where we're at and where we're going. But sometimes it eats up a lot of your time. And that's one of the things I like least about it, just the time constraints. And for myself, only being part time, it's frustrating at times.*
> (DD – youth worker)

> *I mean one of the things we do is we have evaluation forms and we have young people evaluation forms as well, so we encourage them. Unfortunately we are in a culture where we*

have to have so much paperwork evidence, it just sometimes drowns everything, but it has to be done, so we can't look on it as negative, we have to see it as positive really, in terms of funding and to sustain our work as well and to say, 'Yes it is valuable.'
(DD – youth worker)

I'm not sure there is a least important part [of youth work] because I think, I would automatically say, 'Oh it's the paperwork,' but actually the paperwork is important because you need to keep monitoring because unless you do that the [council] will say, 'Well, what are you doing with our money?' So that's important. And that informs the work and what we're doing...But I think there is too much and the work has become to the point where we're becoming saturated with that information and stuff that each funding body...the amount of monitoring and evaluation that it takes to do that stuff its going to take up all my time. And that will take away from my face-to-face, it has to, because if I don't get that paperwork in we lose the funding to do that work in the first place.
(DD – project manager)

The contradiction between recognising the value of paperwork versus its intrusion upon time spent in interpersonal work was also reflected in the conversations of some of the young people:

Kim: *Is this research going to tell the big bosses to stop them doing loads of paper work?* (Laughter) *Because it's crap! Because it's all changed from the young people to computers and paperwork. And it sucks! ... It's like you come in and you expect things to be happening, like it used to, and they are just all sitting at computers and talking about paperwork.*

Laura: *Then again, most of the time when the young people do get involved in the paperwork, you see how important it is. I mean with all the stuff we did with [this project] like, you sit down and you look at the paper work, and you've got an evaluation form for something and you're like 'Why am I doing this? What is the point in that?' And then you realise you are evaluating that so that you can decide if that event was a success, if your point of view was actually heard. And if it wasn't you've got a piece of paper that you can write on, 'No, your event was rubbish', so it is kind of worthwhile, young people getting involved in the paperwork, because then we get our say as well. And it means the workers don't have to do as much, we get writer's cramp instead...*

Kim: *Over the years this place has changed... I can't think of how to describe it without saying, 'Paperwork!' Fifty times.*
(FG – young people)

Workers adopt different strategies in an effort to manage the absolute increase in their workload. Of course, when face-to-face conditions are difficult, full time workers can use the demands of paperwork as an excuse to avoid working directly with young people but this was only observed in the research in one situation. Mostly, workers attempt to find a balance in the working day by allocating particular times to 'admin.' Sometimes this was undertaken at times when young people were absent, at other times young people were present but allowed to 'amuse themselves,' and sometimes the workers chose a particularly quiet time of the week

to dedicate to such work. None of these practices were ideal. The realities of the everyday circumstances of the young people inevitably and frequently intruded. For example:

Jane: *Part of my role is doing the things that need to be done in the office. It could be your normal things like answering the telephone, dealing with queries, dealing with young women as they come to the door because young women, they don't have to be referred to the project by a specialist. They can just find out about us, come to the door, ring the bell and have a range of issues or an issue that they need to discuss with a worker and they can come in and be dealt with in a confidential environment. If we can't work with that ...then obviously we can refer to somebody else who can. So there's dealing with that sort of thing*

Mary: *People have come along with all their worldly goods in two carrier bags haven't they?*

Jane: *Yeah just land at your door and then you deal with those sorts of things. I have a responsibility for doing the finance [laughs], not in the job description, but its one of things that we have to do. So it's dealing with the all the things that keeps the office management ticking over.*

Researcher: *Do you have separate time to do that or is it all -?*

Margie: *It's just all in part of the day isn't it?*

Mary: *Yeah but for finance we try to keep that for a Friday morning because a Friday morning's when we have no groups in. So it's a time possibly,*

Jane: *But if someone came in*

Mary: *That's right, that has to get dropped*

Margie: *That's not just because I was in on Friday and it was manic* [laughs]

Mary: *Yeah* (All laughing)

Margie: *And I said I didn't think anybody did anything on a Friday* [laughing]

Jane: We didn't even stop for lunch. So that's the office management thing – that's a part of my role.
(DD – youth workers)

So long as workers continue to prioritise the needs of young people in their everyday practice, then the paperwork must fit around that. This inevitably means disruption and fragmentation of the focus required for administration. It is therefore quite often the case that such work is not completed in work time or is not completed satisfactorily:

What's happening is some staff are taking work home and doing it at home before they come

> *in. Some staff are coming in early to do it and some people are stopping back to make sure the quality of the evaluation. So to me that again is devaluing youth work and youth workers' time, sorry not devaluing I think its manipulating. I think its manipulating youth workers who value youth work and what goes into it, what comes out of it and everything in between, do you know what I mean. And I think that's it, I think the local authority do that and I think the government do it as well.*
> (DD – project manager)

Workers were most likely to take paperwork home with them if their project had an 'open-door' policy or when there were a variety of developmental projects underway which in themselves created paperwork. Indeed it appeared that the more successful the youth work with regard to accessibility and use by young people and in terms of organised projects under way, the less likely that it was that key workers could complete their bureaucratic tasks in work time.

> *The worker talked about how the paperwork and the bureaucracy is a big part of the everyday work they do, but this can often take away from the face-to- face work. He said that he got into the job to work with young people and sometimes ends up doing paperwork in his free time. [While this doesn't seem ideal as paperwork must be part of the job anyway, through spending time with the project it is clear that there is little time to do paperwork during the working day.] The young people pop in and out and often require attention from the workers. Therefore the paperwork becomes secondary to them. They do not have any admin support for the project.*
> (RD)

Workers who do not produce sufficient or adequate paperwork put themselves and their projects 'at risk' when it comes to formal inspections and quality judgements. In one project the researcher observed practice undertaken by skilled and experienced youth workers which was comprehensive, systematic, operated at varying levels, was involved in partnership approaches and was highly valued by the young people. However, the full time worker concentrated his attention on the young people to the detriment of his paperwork. Subsequently, those involved in the project had thought an Ofsted inspection to have not understood the quality of the practice:

> *The worker discussed their experience of an Ofsted Inspection which they felt was false as they had to prepare in advance for it and it wasn't a true representation of a lot of the work that goes on within the wider service. The project had received a 'satisfactory' grade which the young people had written a letter to complain about as they didn't feel it was fair and the inspector hadn't understood what had happened at the session they had observed.*
> (RD)

The line manager of the worker involved was aware of the mismatch between the actual quality of everyday practice and a judgement based upon paperwork supplemented by one visit, and yet could do little other than further encourage the full time worker to 'pay more attention' to the quality of his paperwork. In another project, where records were kept systematically, the project manager was forced to reconstruct information for an Ofsted inspection retrospectively:

I think people are starting to feel the pressure of the inspection which is coming up, and are being put under this pressure by senior managers in the service. The manager had been told that he needed to get together the statistics for the detached project for the last year by noon tomorrow, a breakdown of the numbers of people they had met in the past year. This was frustrating for him because he had already provided this information based on the weekly and monthly monitoring but they have either lost them or didn't think of using them and so he had to go back through all the months again and record the required information...The form he was given to complete wasn't straightforward either, it wanted to note the number of young people aged 11-25 and then the number of young people aged 13-19, broken down further into gender and ethnic minority. However the evaluation forms used last year did not include this information, it had ethnic minority but the form wanted to know specifics of, white, Asian, Chinese etc. It seemed quite a big task to complete. While he began to do this there were lots of interruptions from phone calls, requests to do things upstairs, young people wanting to come into the project, as usual. He dealt with all of these as they happened and then got back on with the forms.
(RD)

The type and quality of the information required can change over time and in relation to different funding agencies or the varying systems with which youth work is connected.

Last year, the project had twenty nine different grants to monitor. This is time-consuming – quarterly reports and different measures are called for by the various funders. There is no uniformity. It wouldn't be so bad if they all wanted the same information.
(RD)

Instability and variation in the type of records required does not encourage systems efficiency. In situations which are time and space pressured, when other priorities are more important to professional integrity, even the best efforts of willing workers are likely to be an imprecise reflection of the meaning of practice. When workers are resistant or cynical, the mismatch between practice and records is likely to be much greater.

Some workers experienced the bureaucratic attention to the intrinsic quality of their records as a threat because they believed that even the best records could not, even in ideal conditions, accurately reflect the impact or the meaning of their interventions. Moreover, they often believed that the purposes of such record-keeping were suspect, that they were not primarily, as presented, to improve practice in its own terms, but rather intended for monitoring and surveillance of both young people and youth workers in other and sometimes conflicting terms. In this sense, 'paperwork' contained contested issues about the processes and the meanings of accountability.

10.3 Accountability

There is undoubtedly an overlap between accounting for the quality of practice in work with young people and accounting for the efficiency of the organisation. In the most harmonious

of organisational systems, and indeed, in the most harmonious of youth work organisations observed in the research, there is at least some congruence between developmental and reflective practice and the records which assess and account for that practice. However, the processes of youth work involve responsiveness to immediate, sometimes unpredictable circumstances as much as to premeditated and planned objectives, while ongoing negotiation with young people is necessary to secure and maintain their participation. In this situation congruence between organisational presuppositions, intentions and rationality cannot always be maintained. Rather than simply applying systems and recording practice using standardised forms, youth workers are more often put into a position where they must actively manage systems in order to prevent them undermining their actual work.

> *I was doing their files with [the young people], and I think sometimes that you get so distracted by the targets that you end up overlooking what youth work is about - which is trying to improve the lives of young people. This can sometimes come about from just being there, but with you having to make sure you've got evidence and that you're meeting your targets then that focus can be taken away.*
> (DD - youth worker)

All the youth workers in the research identified a mismatch between externally imposed systems of accountability and the actual working practices and values inscribed in their approach to young people. Yet they seldom complained about systems which they devised themselves or in collaboration with line managers. The imposition of systems of accountability by forces often identified simply as 'they' or 'them' reflects their subjection to forces which are outside the sphere of their everyday practice and the relative powerless of youth workers to affect the organisational and managerial terms through which their practice is judged:

> Janet: *And the paperwork is prescribed. I mean last year I actually designed some and I was happy using it, but I've been told I've got to now use this stuff. I mean we can try and use things like recorded outcomes -*
>
> John: *They've changed the format for recorded outcomes now as well.*
> (DD - youth workers)

There is widespread anxiety about the consequences for youth work of unsympathetic systems of accountability, and a high level of frustration with the absence of the youth work perspective in the decision-making processes. Sometimes, participants expressed the hope that this research project could represent their voices, could convince policy-makers in particular of the realities of the practice situation in youth work in order that more appropriate systems might be created. Mostly they believed that it was lack of understanding which led to the current mismatch between criteria and processes of accountability and their own values and working realities. They seemed to be at a loss as to how to articulate their understanding in terms which might bridge the gap between themselves and decision makers. Yet in the discussions with the researchers, youth workers explained fluently and coherently how systems were distorting practice. They implicitly recognised that different criteria were operating in face-to-face practice on the one hand and in organisational decision making on the other. This speaks not of a failure of policy

makers to understand, but rather of a different discourse which, from the position of policy, does not include the values and perspectives of traditional youth work but is rather intended to shape youth work according to the assumptions and expectations of policy.

> *I think it can lose its way a little bit in terms of its getting so prescribed, and there's so many things that you have to do. It contradicts the fact that, what about the things that they want to do instead of things that they have to do? And whilst you'd like it to be completely led by young people sometimes unfortunately you'll have your own targets now and you'll have your own things that you'll have to hit. Whereas before if you were a conscientious worker you'd know the things that you should be working on anyway. Like you want to be covering these curriculum areas and it's how you do that. The creativity comes in how you design a session to do that, how you respond to the needs of the young people. So what you're doing is more reactive rather than proactive, and that probably doesn't sound the best way to be, but it is because you're responding to them as opposed to responding to what somebody's said sitting in an office who says this is how you work with young people...and you'd get to the same sort of outcome because at the end of the day the young person can still go on that journey. They're still going to be here at this point and when you work with them for a period of time then they've got to that point. But if they don't recognise their learning, then OK, there's an issue, but they might not recognise their learning straight away, they might not think about it until two, three, four years later, 'Oh yeah that's where I thought about this, that's where I explored that.' And then they might come back to you but they might not. But it's about you recognising, 'Well I've done what I could with this young person,' or 'I should be doing these things, these guidelines and targets.' And if it's there to stop people shirking their responsibilities and not doing their job properly then it needs to be a lot more stringent. And it needs to be, well if the person is not doing their job properly, what they should be doing with the young people, then you change the person you don't change the whole ethos of youth work, do you know what I mean? It doesn't make sense.*
> (DD – project manager)

Fundamentally, the anxiety seems to devolve around the question of who or what controls youth work practice. For the youth worker operating from the perspective of traditional professional values, the primary accountability is to the young person in a relationship bounded by a set of professional values and responsibilities. This is not a position held ideologically, but rather one which emerges in the context of the reality of everyday practice. Whilst there have always been other accountabilities, mainly to the employing organisation and to funding bodies which set more or less rigorous conditions and policies within which practice takes place, traditionally there has been space for interpretation and flexibility to deal with the realities of practice. Full time youth workers have been trusted to account for their work in their own terms within the framework of organisational aims and objectives. In the new climate, which reflects the intentions of government to target public finance at specific groups of young people towards specific ends, the space for interpretation is being closed down. This is not being done by local management committees. Indeed, the evidence suggests that locally based management retains a co-operative and trusting relationship with workers. Rather it is a primarily a consequence of dependence upon public finance. The targets and outcomes to which youth workers in receipt of public finance are now being required to account for the effectiveness of their practice are

of a different order from those prevailing in the years when generic youth work was growing and developing as a public sector profession (Ministry of Education, 1960). The price today of being fully integrated into professional services for young people is an increasingly systematised approach to practice in which the interpretive, flexible and open-ended character of informal educational approaches is decentred. Some of the dilemmas were recorded in the research in relation to changes taking place in Scotland during the fieldwork period of the research:

> *There have been a lot of changes in youth work in Scotland...This shaped the way forward for youth work as part of Community Learning Development, and put them at the forefront of community planning and showed youth work as the front line partner to work with schools etc. This was nice as up until then youth work had been the poor cousin, but it was also scary as now everyone is looking at what youth work is doing. This has led to new tighter systems to justify and measure the work... Some of the framework is good but the work needs to be ongoing otherwise it's oppressive. These systems may be good for HMI and accountability but in practice there needs to be more space within it. Projects need to reflect the needs of the community, young people and workers, but the new systems don't reflect this...[The evaluation framework] was designed by an academic, but didn't work with real work with people in practice. People had adapted it and there is a standard system across the team...HMI can be a useful and constructive experience, offering an external perspective and advice. It can get you up to speed, show you where you are doing well and point you in the right direction. However some people see it as more of a test.*
> (RD - meeting with team leader)

In the process of organisational change, the assumption of a primary accountability towards the young person and to practice emerging from dialogue with young people, no longer holds. The balance of accountability has been shifted towards the organisation's duty to fulfil the goals of public policy. And these are not created with youth work and young people at the centre, but rather with reference to social problems - to questions about inclusion and exclusion, social order and financial efficiency. This does not allow for dissent or difference between the objectives of practice negotiated with the young person and the objectives of the organisation. However, the imperatives of everyday youth work realities mean that even if youth workers fully accept organisational criteria for accountability, they are not in a position to simply conform instrumentally. Thus the experience of externally imposed systems tends to be of distortion of and distraction from what is actually happening.

> *They have just bought in a system where the street based workers record the issues that have come up during the sessions, as this is something that the project are being asked to provide by various partners. There had been a form for sessions that was based on a tick box asking about which issues had been covered. The workers weren't sure that this was helpful as staff were cramming the issues into sessions 'alcohol, drugs, HIV'. Staff were realising they hadn't covered anything and so were asking a young person, 'Have you smoked drugs this week?' Just so they could then tick the box!*
> (RD)

> *The worker was trying to set up some 'generic forms' so that all funders requirements can be*

met via the one system. One funder wanted postcodes for all the young people they worked with – the project said they were unable to provide these (Data Protection Act) and the funder has gone away to look at alternatives (...scope for negotiation with some funders). There are problems with asking young people to fill in forms as many can't write. One funder changed the information that they wanted half way through – meaning that the organisation have had to chase this information up afterwards which is problematic. After the first audit with this funder the manager was in tears.
(RD)

It means you're talking less and less about the young person and more and more about, well, targets.
(DD – youth worker)

Because practitioners and young people are excluded from central decision-making except via 'consultation' processes constructed within the discourse of policy, youth workers are forced to manage two systems to the best of their ability. On the one hand they continue to engage with young people according to the dictates of everyday reality and with reference to their traditional professional value system. On the other hand, they attempt to meet the demands of government – and other funding agencies such as charitable trusts and corporate organisations – by submitting to the demands to complete the paperwork which records outcomes and indicates that they have met pre-determined targets using methods which do not undermine their practice:

I like to try and achieve positive outcomes for young people without that trying to sound too techie. I mean positive outcomes that are identified by the young people not by a booklet which will give you a selection of positive outcomes. I like young people to create their own and set their own goals for where they want to get to. So if I can play a part in them getting each step of the way to that goal then I'm quite happy with that. That's job satisfaction.
(DD – youth worker)

We've got to provide the evidence and part of that is we fill out sessional evaluation forms, termly evaluation forms, reports, photographic and video evidence and we get young people to. But how we like to work here is, we have young people inputting in the planning so it's not, 'Right! Hi come in, the next twelve weeks are going to be spent like this', its 'Hi come in, let's be involved in the programme.' Yes we might encourage it a bit more and lead it to a degree, because we might say, 'On these dates, these things are happening in these areas, maybe we can take part in it?' But we'd like to think that it's young people led as well. And we'd like to think that we're empowering young people to take some responsibility in how the group is run. We don't want it to be like, the workers run the group and the young people just come along. Their contribution is valuable and also by contributing they're taking an active role so therefore you're more likely to keep the young people coming as well...and we ask young people about how they think the programme went and sessionally as well, if they want to fill them in. So that's always an option there...
(DD – youth worker)

10.4 The problem of statistics

Youth workers tend to conceptualise the dichotomy between what they value in their work and what is valued by external authorities, as qualitative practice versus quantitative measures. The impact of Transforming Youth Work has been to weight accountability quantitatively via pre-determined targets and outcomes. When youth workers complain about paperwork and administration it is because they believe that the statistics which they are providing run counter to the ethos of 'quality' practice:

> *So then it's more for their statistics and for me it's not about statistics. If I don't hit the total number that somebody says I'm supposed to hit but I know I've done quality work with a group of young people, with an individual young person, then that for me is better than saying, 'Well I've worked with thirty kids today and they were all here.' You can work with thirty kids and do nothing. And ...when I used to do part time youth work I could be in a sports hall and my job seemed to be maintaining order, keeping these young people in line. And because I could do that, when the other youth work hours got cut, mine got extended. But in terms of the information and advice that these workers are doing that's needed more than me playing basketball for three hours. But it was better because I got thirty kids off the streets. You have to learn that yourself and go through that to say, 'Okay then. Do I want to do this, or do I want to do quality work? Or do I want to just concentrate on quantity?'*
> (DD- project manager)

> Joanne: *I mean the most important bit of the work is the dialogue, I think.*

> Jamie: *Building the relationship.*

> Joanne: *There's not a really effective way of recording the qualitative evidence of personal and social development. It's all kind of quantitative and it's an inappropriate framework I think.*
> (DD – youth workers)

> *You can't measure the difference in self esteem between the beginning of a session and the end.*
> (RD)

> Marie: *It's the difference between quality and quantity, you can get a hundred people walk in here in one week which looks fantastic, but what have they done? Picked up a leaflet or asked for directions, whereas you might have two people in all week, but you could have really turned their life around in that week. But if it's down to numbers, 'We're funding x number of staff to work with two young people all week?'*
> (DD – youth worker)

The antipathy which many youth workers have to 'measurement' and 'statistics,' expresses their belief that such approaches cannot fully account for the creative and dynamic richness of practice. It reflects the fact that neither youth workers nor young people account for the value of the work in these terms. Whilst quantitative measures are indicative of the impact of youth

work in terms of specified foci and concrete outcomes, and they do give a rough indication of numbers of young people reached, they are unable to capture the value of the developmental, social and informal educational approaches. Calculating the effectiveness of youth work using numerical measures might offer something to a crude cost-benefit analysis, but such measures are not designed to 'reflect' the quality of youth work from the perspectives of young people or workers. Inevitably, they entirely miss or negatively impact upon some integral aspects of the work.

> *There is a constant danger of accreditation taking over the developmental aspects and vice-versa. They try to build space for fun onto the programme- something that is nothing to do with the programme or evaluation. That is often the thing that the young women enjoy most.*
> (RD)

The numbers of participants and the worthy outcomes recorded in statistical evidence refer to problem-orientated interventions. They cannot evidence that aspect of youth work which talks about 'happy things' rather than problems, which promotes joy and friendship, which listens to silences and values small improvements. Yet these are things which are not only important to youth workers, but also central to the value which young people accord to it.

> *I go to The Girls Group and so far all of the sessions I have been to, and I've never missed one. My confidence has raised, with me being there. I'm much more positive and I'm much more confident and that's all thanks to The Girls Group and the workers ...I've changed, I mean I was very shy, low self esteem, non- confident, before I came here. And now, I mean I never went out the house, I used to be in the house every night, I had no friends at all...I mean I was such a negative person and I'm just not negative anymore. I get my negative days, but having people tell me that I can do it. That I'm not, and positive thinking and stuff like that, and it's just made me more positive and saying that is not all doom and gloom.*
> (FG - young woman)

Clearly from the point of view of youth workers and young people, qualitative measures of practice would seem to be more appropriate as a means of communicating its impact. However, this does not take into consideration the fact that there are enormous difficulties associated with qualitative data in recording what is relevant, analysing what is significant and standardising accounts to aid comparability, to say nothing of the time which would be taken in the process.

Developing qualitative approaches which are rigorous and relevant in the organisational context is not impossible but it is particularly difficult in view of the superior status accorded to numerical measures.

There is some evidence that youth workers themselves are complicit and uncritical in according higher value to statistics despite their preference for qualitative material. Using statistics has become part of the performative aspects of youth work. Workers disagree with them, but they are caught up in the dance. When asked to explain the impact of their work, their first instinct is often to refer to the statistics, rather than to speak in their own terms:

> *The fire fighters were asking at the end of the session how the effects of the programme were measured. The workers talked about the reduced crime statistics (which had been seen by many as a key indicator of the success of the programme and lead to some recognition on a regional level). The fire fighters weren't very impressed with this as an answer. They were very keen to hear about the personal situations of the young people on the programme, why they were there 'what they had done.'*
> (RD)

There is no reason in principle why youth workers should not produce statistical records which record bare information about their practice without trying to 'represent' it in terms of its deeper meaning and without expecting such information to do more work than it is capable of doing. As one youth worker acknowledged:

> *With our new funding that we've got for the next two years in the recent supervision I was told that we had targets but they're targets that are supporting, they're quality targets, not to just reach a certain number to satisfy somebody's statistics. They're targets that haven't been set on a high percentage, they've been set on a realistic scale which I'm quite confident that we'll have no problem at all meeting our targets. I think if ever any targets were set for us we'd over achieve.*
> (DD – youth worker)

Statistics are problematic in youth work mainly because they are perceived as the sole basis for judgements about quality, because statistical targets are linked with funding, and insofar as youth projects themselves are not fully engaged in decision-making about the criteria for collecting them. These issues are confused with the value of statistics themselves. The research data suggests that the antagonism to quantitative measures is associated with the experience of powerlessness amongst youth workers to effect the direction of organisational change. The demand for accountability to external, anonymous agents using measures which do not represent what youth workers and young people experience as important, means that statistics become part of the threat of paperwork.

Rich qualitative evidence is not necessarily an alternative to statistics. It can be additional. There is actually little evidence that qualitative research and data is not acceptable to policy-makers and funding agencies when it is collected systematically and with reference to acknowledged research methods. However, youth workers themselves need to promote the value of such evidence and to discover ways of recording their practice which can be incorporated into everyday work without diverting attention from face-to-face practice. A number of workers spoke of the value of stories and anecdotes in these terms:

> Claire: *...there needs to be some evaluation, it's back to what we were talking about at the beginning about being professional and not being seen as professionals, being able to say what we do and saying this is what we do, here's some evidence. It doesn't have to be playing the game in terms of bums on seats but it has to be something*
>
> Sue: *I agree we do have to evidence work even if its just stories, even if it's just a way of*

collecting stories...
(FG - youth worker)

A rich seam of stories and anecdotes of youth workers and young people already exists in the records. These stories offer one source for evaluating the contribution of youth work to the lives of young people but they can only be admitted formally into processes of accountability if they are considered and promoted by workers in these terms. This demands that some attention be paid to qualitative research methods, to the nature of recording and to questions of interpretation and analysis. Stories in themselves are interesting but their meaning needs to be analysed if they are to count as data.

10.5 Evaluation

The language of evaluation is seamlessly interwoven with the problems of bureaucracy and accountability in the narratives of youth workers. This reflects the ways in which 'evaluation' has become primarily a managerial tool for assessing the impact and quality of youth work practice. Exactly what is being evaluated is not always clear. In conversation, youth workers tend to slip between evaluation as something related to an assessment of changes in young people over time and evaluation as a means of measuring the overall effectiveness of a project in terms of meeting targets and outcomes. The former involves the use of specific tools for measuring personal change, such as the Rickter Scale (Hutchinson and Stead, 1994); SpiritLevel (Kent, 2002) and the Connexions APIR tool (CSNU, 2001). The latter attempts to gear evidence towards the specific criteria associated with the social exclusion agenda and NEET. The two approaches are related and can of course overlap so that the real development of a young person can be defined entirely in terms of the outcomes needed for the project to be accountable:

I was talking about that in my supervision. I was like 'Look, I've put', because my three Monday lads are a handful, 'I've put two of them through for a recorded outcome, one of them doesn't deserve one. I could have made one up for him and got him to sign it but I don't work like that - credit where credit's due'. If he was being more involved in things, his attendance is terrible, he's hit and miss, and I was like 'I'm not going to do that'. I'm not going to put people through for things just so you can hit a button and hit your target. If they deserve it they will get it and I will try and work it round so it'll look a bit better for them but they have to give something before this is going to get done.
(DD - youth worker)

In this case, achieving a recorded outcome has slipped from being a quality of the project into becoming a quality of the young person. However, it is more usual for the two processes to be conceptually separated and for the measures of evaluating the impact of youth work upon young people to then contribute to the recorded outcomes for purposes of accountability.

Although these measures of evaluating the progress of young people, and by implication the impact of youth work are designed to assist in the measurement of subjective, 'soft' outcomes, which are in the mainstream of youth work concerns, there were mixed feelings about them

in practice. Exploring concepts such as love, sexuality, spirituality, self-esteem and ultimately, personal development assists young people to come to terms with their feelings and beliefs and the beliefs of others but using these tools is often experienced as a rather crude and reductive approach to assessing such qualitative development.

Evaluation tools were thought to be useful as an aid to focused discussion in formal programmes but irrelevant to assessing the impact of the small but 'critical moments' which youth workers valued so highly as an indication of a young person's progress. Standardised approaches to important developmental topics using attitudinal scales as a measure ultimately offers little more than other statistical measures within a set time-period, communicating very little of the actual work and effects which manifest outside the time-scale of the tool.

There were some serious questions about the accuracy of these tools :

> *The project uses Rickter (the training was provided free) with some young people. The problem they found with it is that it takes a while for changes to register. On one short course they took a reading before and afterwards and found the scores went down. On closer inspection it appeared that the young people were looking at themselves more honestly after the course. Another factor is that if the young person likes the member of staff and wants to do them a favour they may rank themselves higher. If a young person has a number of issues, Rickter can be a useful way of examining these so 'it has its place.' (Again focusing on the process of using it rather than it in itself as an evaluation mechanism).*
> (RD)

Completed forms were offered to the researchers in a number of projects as examples of evaluation processes used. The research diaries suggest that the problems of accuracy are compounded by problems of comparability. For example:

> *We were given two examples of the evaluation forms, they were short (two sides) with key headings that the workers wrote under. They had been completed by the two different full time workers, and showed quite different styles and approaches. They asked for 'outcomes' and then indicators and evidence of these. The kind of outcomes that were identified were 'young people feel good about themselves, self esteem, increased knowledge base, confidence.' The distinction between outcomes, indicators and evidence was unclear.*
> (RD)

Evaluation forms designed to demonstrate the progress of young people use a proliferation of styles and criteria. Different forms are designed for some aspects of practice, tried out, amended, and changed according to needs in other parts of projects. It is difficult not to sympathise with one worker who asked 'What is it all for? What are organisations going to do with all this information?'

There are some situations in youth work where an evaluation or assessment tool might contribute to the work. In such situations, they are incorporated into the developmental process - and mainly it is in developmental processes such as counselling or specific curriculum-based

work where these tools are used to make a contribution. However, they are not globally useful and in some cases their introduction might even be counter-productive and distracting.

The struggles around designing and using evaluation tools are probably best encapsulated in the following long transcript from one of the focus group discussions:

Sue: *We have a form that, two forms, a scaling form, ' I don't feel ok: I feel ok; I've got healthy relationships: I've got poor relationships,' and people come out where they are on the spectrum when they first come. So they'd do that at the beginning of the counselling, 'I've got good housing or I need better housing.' There's about ten, twelve of them. So as part of starting of counselling we'd ask them to fill this in very quickly and at the end of the contracted counselling we'd ask them to fill it in again. And there's a box, 'Do you think [Sue] has helped?' So we can evaluate where they've got to. They evaluate the changes they've made, and in my experience most don't want to look at the first sheet again when they're doing the second one. But some do. And they say, 'Oh look' and we get both sheets out and they'll say, 'This is really interesting,' and you'll do another ten, twenty minutes of work of how they've changed. On the whole they've gone up. Sometimes it hasn't and you can pick that up and work on, the information side. But it's very defined.*

We were hoping to run it on both sides of the project. So information workers would also be doing the scaling, but it just hasn't happened. It hasn't worked and part of that is because the information side's so reactive. It's actually quite complicated to bring this form in and start working with it. And also, I think workers' energy is about, if there's a bit of a crisis on and you want to be moving things on and there's other forms to fill in, in terms of confidentiality and what agencies the young people can work with, and that sort of thing. So it's given us a lot of useful information on the counselling side but it's just not worked on the [other] side. So I need to get back thinking again about how to measure that side of the work

Marie: *Is it a bit like that Rickter Scale?*

Sue: *Yes but we couldn't afford it so it's Sue's version* [laughter – unrelated chat]. *We do statistical information as well, how many 16 year olds come in...*

Claire: *We keep a lot of case files for young people which aren't an evaluation but they can be used as an evaluation. It's easy to get if you were to look at somebody's file that even if you work with them once or over a long period of time that you could pick up a good sense of the work that was done and use that to evaluate, partly the impact that we've had on them and the changes and you could make stories from that*

Sue: *Yes I think that's how our annual report will be this year. And I think actually it's more interesting for people. It is the story bit that people find interesting. We usually get some feedback at annual reports and people always say the story bits are the bits they find interesting because it becomes really tangible and people understand the work that you're doing and I think that's been very important in making this place seem like a very professional place in terms of other agencies, in terms of having annual reports and these stories going out*

there and when I talk to other agencies its always the stories. Can you tell us some more about the young people coming in?

Claire: *Which is maybe where we need to start from in terms of not trying to fit in with other people's ways of evaluating but just...*

Linda: *I suppose evaluating our own work as we go along without the Rickter stuff, is often when you're working with a young person, they come in with one thing and they end up going out with another. And you go through the process, 'Now have you understood everything we've talked about? Is there anything you need? Will you come back? Have we met your needs?'.... So you do your own personal evaluation to make sure you've done as much as you can for that person at the time*

Sue: *And team meetings are really important and we evaluate work as a team and to somebody outside it might sound as if we're just talking about stuff but if you've got a healthy team then people are challenging and saying, 'What's that about?' and so we're evaluating the work and that's been fundamental in increasing our professionalism and having that environment where its safe for us to help each other but also challenge supportively. We're doing it all the time, 'Have you thought of this or that and that?' also demonstrates to young people that we don't know everything* [laughs].

Linda: *That's true youth work isn't it? It's about your own knowledge base and being able to think and work on your feet and being able to move people on and prioritise things as you go along and that's some of the fundamentals of what we do. And the more of us that do it because we want to do it and will become trained or have done the research, I don't believe that everyone whose a good worker has to have a qualification but those people that can reflect and look at the work it's all evaluation as you go along isn't it?*
(FG – youth workers)

These youth workers noticeably move in their conversation without any intervention from the researcher from a position where they are talking about the value of an evaluation tool in a counselling situation to a position where they are claiming that these tools are unnecessary for the quality of practice. They do this without rejecting the importance of evaluation, but by shifting towards one notion of evaluation which is relevant to and part of the process of engagement with the young person and to another which is relevant to the process of professional development with colleagues. In the former case, evaluation is entirely divorced from any accountability to anyone other than to the young person and in the latter, the accountability is towards colleagues in the process of working as a team.

In this context, the use of evaluation as a means of assessing young people's experiences of youth work practice seems to make sense and it is becoming regular practice for young people to fill in forms after each organised session. This is understood at one level as a participative procedure, ensuring that young people's views are considered, and at another level, as a quality assurance procedure, ensuring that what youth workers provide is relevant to the young people involved. All of the projects involved in the research included young people's evaluations as a

standard part of at least some of their practice.

It was recognised that some young people were more articulate than others about the impact that a project can have. Both workers and young people commented upon the problems some young people may have identifying and articulating impact and in evaluating:

> *It's the type of change where some people wouldn't physically be able to describe it but they know. They'd felt it. And sometimes it's better to capture a moment with, whether it's like video or with a photo as opposed to writing it down on a piece of paper.*
> (FG – young person)

Some workers talked about developing innovative/creative ways of evaluating. For instance in one project, young people used plasticine or play dough to make something relevant to the programme they had attended, which is then photographed. Another project used a Big Brother style diary room chair to gain the young people's perspectives on a summer activities programme. In another:

> *The organisation does some basic evaluation with young people (using smiley faces, recorded discussions, or asking young people to record some comments on a post-it note which are then thrown at a worker!)*
> (RD)

In some situations, young people completed evaluations of sessions without any discussion. They simply accepted them as a necessary part of their involvement. However, gaining evaluations from young people was not always as straightforward a process. In one project, a group who had just returned from a weekend residential which they had planned, resisted completing evaluation forms because for them, their participation in the event was now ended. They did not see the relevance of the evaluation form though they were informally discussing the weekend with their friends and others who had not attended.

This type of situation prompted some workers to suggest that informal feedback from young people might be a more appropriate and reliable basis for the assessment and development of practice than the formal information contained on forms. Some talked about the way in which the real evaluation takes place after the formal evaluation. Unprompted feedback from young people via letters, thank you cards and conversations were highly valued by workers as providing a more personal and genuine reflection of young people's experiences. And of course, these documents could be used as evidence in processes of accountability. However, it was usually the case that the real evaluations of young people were expressed in the conversational processes of youth work:

> *Susan: You know through talking to the young people, you ask them informally, you have conversations and discuss with them what they have, what they think they have gained out of the experience*
> (DD – youth worker)

> *When asked about her key memories of the programme the worker identified the young women saying they wanted the programme to continue at the end. She identified 'small steps', 'having the confidence to write on the flip chart.' She also emphasised the importance of the social aspect of the programme as something that the participants really valued- but this was not necessarily valued by the funders...The best bits of the evaluation are the things that the young women have said- the quotes and things. They show the impact.*
> (RD)

The relationship between the evaluations of young people and the accountability of youth work was not entirely clear. One worker expressed concern about the way selected quotes can be used on 'glossy leaflets' about the work that projects do with young people.

> *One of the things that does my head in is these glossy leaflets that come round about organisations, and we have them too, and on the back there's two young people going, 'This is just the most wonderful experience of my life, and this has just changed me.' And, you know, there's another hundred comments out there that are missing. Nobody ever writes 'This was crap and I don't want to come back' (laughter) on the back of their shiny leaflets*
> (DD - youth worker)

Such comments correspond with a general suspicion that formal evaluations offer an account of practice which is highly suspect in terms of its relationship with the realities of the fieldwork situation. Worse than this, some workers believed that these systems can be used to obscure 'bad practice,' that it is possible to hide behind the evidence provided in the 'paperwork' and that some data was being gathered for no good reason:

> *I mean fair enough young people have problems in their lives. What is a funder really going to do with that information? Fair enough they're probably going to think this person is working well because he knows this information but they can't really do much with it. And for all they know we could be lying, do you know what I mean?*
> (DD - youth worker)

Ultimately for the youth workers and the young people who participated in the research, the main justification for the use of evaluation procedures and tools was the improvement of practice and the development of young people. In this regard there is a relationship between evaluation and professional and personal reflection in the educational context of practice. As such, evaluation is a benefit in its own terms, separate from systems of organisational accountability, even though it might contribute to them:

> *The question was raised about whether evaluation was about 'the form' or about the reflection process. How you see it changes the way that it is used.*
> (RD)

The third meaning of evaluation identified in the research is that associated with professional and agency development. In only one organisation was this prioritised and integrated into practice. The method adopted here was similar to action research. Finance was allocated for

the employment of an external evaluator to engage in developmental supervision with youth workers, using recordings and evaluation forms as evidence for their discussions and as a basis for reflective professional learning. Such an approach is sympathetic to educational ideas about reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984) and the evidence suggests that there is a good case for justifying such practices. It is apparent that such an approach requires sympathetic organisational systems, finance and an acknowledgement of the necessity for time for reflection and analysis which encompasses failure as well as success without fear of penalty. Again, it is crucial for the success of such an approach that accountability and evaluation should be separated:

> *Currently the worker is employed as a researcher so there is a lot of recording, as well as time built in for reflection; she felt that she perhaps had as much as was needed really within youth work. There are days set aside for evaluation and reflection, as well as a focus on reflection in supervision sessions. This seems to link with the wider culture of the organisation; evaluation is valued as being able to contribute to the development of practice and also informing and lobbying for policy change. It seemed that the workers I spoke to saw the relevance of evaluation to their work and so were engaging with it in a more positive rather than piecemeal way. The worker felt that not everybody valued the evaluation process. The structure of the work/day meant it can be hard to fill it in at the end of a session, when young people might want lifts home, taxis sorting out etc (However at least two workers I spoke to felt it was important to record the session as soon as possible afterwards- otherwise things get lost)... The worker felt that evaluation is important to develop the programme; you can look at what worked well and what didn't. This can help people who might want to run the programme after you to learn from your experience. Also it helps you to think about your work.*
> (RD)

> *Evaluation- this is about accountability, they have to do it as they are operating in the voluntary sector. However, it has different functions. Yes it is about meeting 'targets' but they seek to 'quietly and efficiently manage these- it is about the management'. But evaluation is also used as evidence of outcomes for the organisation (they don't bother with 10 point scales- they look at gathering evidence using stories and qualitative methods- they are confident that they can see progress and funders listen to this). Evaluation is also important in maintaining staff morale and job satisfaction- being able to see what you have done and what you have achieved*
> (RD)

Although this organisation construed evaluation developmentally, there remained vestiges of the tensions experienced elsewhere. This was explained by the workers partly in terms of the competition for funding which pushed workers to always present their practice in a positive light which they believed did not reflect its realities, and which also caused some aspects of the work to be valued and highlighted over others:

> *There is a gap in research about the feelings and thoughts of workers about the work they do. Things about the impact are recorded, but the worker felt he had put 21/2 years of his life into a project, full of trials, tragedies, stresses and successes. 'Where does that go? The work is also*

> *about how workers feel- it's not only about targets- there is all the internal stuff as well, what motivates you, what makes you do this job.'*
> (RD)

Although in other organisations developmental evaluation was not an explicit feature of organisational design, workers attempted to balance what they perceived to be the negative impact of formal evaluation procedures with systems and approaches of their own which they believed were more sympathetic to practice. When evaluation was part of the culture of an organisation in these terms it was viewed generally in a positive light. As one worker put it, 'If you don't evaluate, you don't learn from your mistakes':

> *But you learn by your mistakes, it's a learning process, you learn more about what you could have done differently and that's the main thing for evaluation*
> (DD - area manager)

Insofar as evaluation is congruent with the process-based approach of youth work it can contribute to learning in practice and there is a strong case for its formal integration into practice in these terms. This suggests that organisations should incorporate adequate time for evaluation and reflection within proposals for funding and project timetables in order to encourage progression and development in the practice environment.

10.6 Creating clarity

There are serious confusions in the processes and practices of evaluation, accountability and bureaucracy. These relate partly to the experience of organisational change and partly to the increased control exercised by the external agencies - government, charitable trusts and private corporations - which fund youth work. Mostly the changes have been instigated by government which requires evidence for the impact of public expenditure.

At present, youth workers experience these processes negatively, even when they do not have principled arguments against them. This reflects a position of powerlessness both in terms of agendas being set outside practice realities and in terms of the absence of a clearly articulated alternative to the organisational processes currently dominating practice. Partly the difficulties are associated with the ways in which evaluation has been merged into procedures for accountability. This hinders the potential for developing the process-based and qualitative approach to evaluation which would sit more appropriately with practice values than simple statistical measurement of outcomes and 'qualitative' tools for the measurement of change.

Youth workers themselves need to promote the value of the type of evidence which they can gather as a complement to their practice priorities and to discover ways of recording and analysing such evidence in a manner which promotes these priorities. There are important commonalities and levels of agreement across a wide spectrum of youth work practice which demonstrate that the principles and values of youth work as informal education are meaningful to both youth workers and young people. It is therefore relevant to consider the role of

evaluation in these terms and to ask how external bodies might be convinced that the processes of informal education must be prioritised if the benefits of the youth work approach are to be realised.

It is often unclear to practitioners why the criteria for both evaluation and accountability which are set outside of practice are often unsympathetic to the realities of practice. This is partly because there is an overlap between the language of policy and practice. Policy makers have taken practice concepts and used them instrumentally in a manner which suggests that political and organisational values are consonant with professional practice values and the interests of young people. This is an ideal which is not representative of reality. The consequence is that the 'is' of youth work practice has become separated from the 'ought' of policy and this adds to the confusion between accountability and evaluation.

Evaluation for the purposes of organisational efficiency is not necessarily the same as evaluation for the personal development of young people or the professional development of workers and projects. It is legitimate to undertake all types of evaluation. However, it is unlikely that all can be rolled into one process, especially when the meaning of practice is contested territory, but also in relation to the variety of funding sources upon which youth projects depend for their existence and the variety of young people who use their resources. In such circumstances, the weight of evaluation can be crippling and counter-productive particularly in relation to the low levels of resources upon which the youth work sector relies. The amount of time taken by 'paperwork' from that which is considered by all parties to be of most importance and value, the face-to-face work with young people, is absolute.

This does not mean that youth work should not be accountable or that it should not be measured. However, informal, everyday encounters are important and contribute a major part of the whole picture of practice. Accounting for the spaces and the time, for the silences, the light-hearted and the patience which is necessary to construct the conditions in which some young people can flourish cannot be accomplished by simple measures. Ultimately, if the aim is to produce youth work which 'works' for young people, then accountability to young people in their terms and to the values of professional youth work practice must also be incorporated into judgements and assessment of quality.

There is no system of evaluation which can account for all practice for all purposes. Nor should it attempt to. Some information which youth workers obtain from young people does and should remain in the private sphere. Not all evidence is numerical, but by the same token, sometimes numerical evidence is preferable to qualitative evidence which is more likely to reveal personal information. Deciding what is appropriate, deciding why evidence is collected, the most appropriate evidence for which purposes and the limits of this should be as much a professional judgement as a judgement of funders and politicians.

The development of democratic organisational practices which move beyond the spurious claims of 'consultation' are a key to winning the consent of youth workers and young people for any processes of accountability which are developed. In the current situation, policy has already been decided, and systems are already in place which are set to reconfigure youth work. Meanwhile,

youth workers struggle to maintain what they know to be relevant and important in the everyday world of practice. If the dynamic of their practice is to endure in their own terms, they will necessarily be engaged for some time to come in operating a dual system of accountability to outside agencies and to youth workers. In the long term, a reassertion of the values of professional practice in the public sphere is essential if youth work is to retain what is distinctive in its approach. In order to begin the process of establishing this, youth workers could do worse than to speak about the values of practice publicly and in the sure knowledge that what they do is worthwhile and can be accounted for in their own terms.

Chapter 11:

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

11.1. Dimensions of everyday practice

- The values of professional youth work are inextricably related to the realities of the practice situation. These realities are given conceptual cohesion in the language of 'informal education' which encapsulates both the informal, relational aspects of the work and its intentions towards constructive learning and development.

- Even when young people are not receiving anything from youth projects other than a space in which they can conduct their own social lives in safety and away from the negative connotations of the street, those projects are providing a social service.

- It is the open informality of youth work which encourages the engagement of young people who refuse other institutional participation.

- Informal education does not foreclose other, more structured approaches to practice but it is a necessary pre-requisite for maximising the benefits of such practice for the young people who are the targets of policy.

- Youth work begins with informal approaches which are person-centred and relational and moves into planned, structured interventions which can be issue or problem-centred.

- Policy priorities are problem-centred and require planned, structured interventions as a means to achieving pre-determined outcomes. These underestimate the importance of the informal for youth work. The difficulties which can be encountered when youth work is problem-orientated are manifest in the work with referred groups of young people.

- Youth work interventions are not appropriate for all young people at all times. It is important to recognise this in the context of partnership working.

- The dimensions of everyday practice involve youth workers in a range of responsibilities. Whilst representations of the work focus upon the central relationship with young people, the boundaries of practice are much broader than this would suggest. Everyday practice is affected by local culture and by the

relationships which young people have with other institutions and other people, as well as with each other. Youth workers tend to work at the interstices and on the margins of other, more dominant institutions such as family, school and police.

11.2. Communication

- Communication is the key to understanding youth work practice.

- The significance of communication can be masked and even hindered by the emphasis upon activities, programmes and outcomes. Some methods of communication such as organising buildings and programmes are seldom discussed in the representation of practice.

- The ability to listen and to interpret the words and behaviour of young people as individuals and groups is the most important youth work skill. Relationships with young people are established mainly through the art of listening. This is primarily present-orientated.

- Conversation operates at various levels within face-to-face practice and can move rapidly from the light and chatty to the serious. It is not linear and it does not take place within defined spaces and places but operates in structured as well as unstructured situations.

- The outcomes of conversation cannot be pre-determined. Nor can they be evaluated within specific time-frames.

- When communicating with outsiders and in formal representations of practice, youth workers tend to 'perform' in terms of what they think is required of them rather than in terms relating to the realities of their practice. This is indicative of a lack of confidence in their own professional voice. Their incorporation into partnership approaches organised with reference to youth problems rather than youth potential exacerbates the silencing of their perspective or sets it up as oppositional.

- Some external agency representatives understand the nature of youth work but most do not. Youth workers are often positioned as a 'service' organisation to other institutions and in this situation the language of youth work is irrelevant.

- Some young people are highly articulate about the benefits of their association with youth work and this might be improved even further through the incorporation of methods of evaluation in practice. However, other young people are not reflexive about their involvement and do not readily use verbal skills for purposes of communication. This has consequences for the achievement of outcomes, for evaluation and for the representation of different groups of young people in research and consultation processes.

11.3. Social exclusion

- Social exclusion discourses depend upon a deficit model. One of the reasons youth work is effective in engaging with young people who might be defined as problematic, is because it does not define them in these terms. Centring the young people themselves is crucial to the process of winning their voluntary engagement but the focus on social exclusion centres problems rather than people.
- To design programmes which do not refer primarily to the positive identities of young people, which highlight 'deficit', 'lack' or 'failure' in relation to other social institutions and with reference to goals created externally, without the participation of the young people, undermines the positive approach of youth work and creates conditions for its failure. This does not mean that youth work itself is problematic, but that it does not work well in response to abstractions. It needs the constant grounding in the realities of young people's lives, the knowledge which comes from dialogue with them and the willingness to attempt to meet their self-defined needs and interests in order to succeed.

- Whilst some youth interventions designed in response to the social exclusion agenda can succeed well in specialised situations, this depends upon the maintenance of the professional informal educational values of youth work within the youth work team. The full potential of generic youth work is being inhibited by the way in which the social exclusion discourse fragments practice into specialisms. This situates youth work in a secondary position in relation to other institutions and exacerbates the tendency to focus upon problems rather than people. In so doing it displaces what is central to the youth work approach.

11.4. Bureaucracy, accountability and evaluation

- There is confusion in practice between bureaucracy, accountability and methods of evaluation.

- In the process of organisational change, the balance of accountability has been shifted towards the organisation's duty to fulfil the goals of public policy and away from young people themselves as the primary reference point for accountability.

- Youth workers are primarily concerned with face-to-face practice and with the local and professional context within which that practice takes place. They are not centrally involved as practitioners in the formal discussions in the world of policy making, partnership work and funding allocation, nor do they prioritise these concerns. The development of democratic organisational practices are key to winning the consent of youth workers and young people for processes of accountability.

- In order to prevent the further marginalisation of the central and most valuable features of the youth work approach, consideration must be given to questions of

representation, participation and consultation in decisions which have a direct effect upon practice.

- Statistics are set to remain problematic in youth work so long as they are used by external authority as the principal measure of quality and so long as youth projects themselves are not fully engaged in decision-making about the criteria for collecting them. Youth workers would prefer and might make a contribution to the development of rigorous and more sympathetic qualitative methods, but these serve a different purpose to quantitative measures.

- Formal organisational demands for particular types of outcome inevitably gear youth projects towards working with young people who are more likely to meet those outcomes.
- There is some urgency in the need for youth workers to articulate the voice of practice in public arenas and in formal decision-making bodies in order to contribute to debates about bureaucracy, accountability and evaluation in terms which are relevant to their situation. This involves participating in discussion about the nature of professionalism.

- The language of youth work practice is currently underdeveloped. It sits within the theoretical framework of informal education, but this needs to be pursued with reference to evidence from the field that such a theoretical approach 'works.' Youth workers need to use research methodologies to both further their reflexive understanding of their practice and to demonstrate its value in a wider network of professional services for children and young people. This is relevant to methods of evaluation.

11.5. Research lessons

- It is hoped that the research explored in this report can make a contribution to a broader public understanding of the relevance of professional youth work and that it can further help to clarify the youth work 'voice.'

- Recording the 'everyday' in practice raised practical and conceptual problems for the research in terms of recording and prioritising data. Nevertheless, the openness of the research approach to the informal, the unstructured, and the inarticulate has facilitated documentation of some of the 'realities' of life in youth projects which are seldom otherwise recorded.

- Offering workers time to reflectively consider their practice without any implied judgement mirrors non-managerial supervision in some ways and signifies the developmental value of this process compared to judgemental evaluation procedures.

- This research needs to be considered as a contribution to debates about the meaning

of practice and about the responsibilities of representation. Through engagement with youth workers and young people in everyday practice, it became increasingly apparent that the significance of this piece of work is to return to the field that which it has given so freely whilst accommodating the researchers.

- Whilst it is hoped that this report will be of value to policy-makers, it has been written principally with reference to the needs of practitioners. It is hoped that youth workers will find in it an analysis which they can recognise from their own perspective. In this sense we present it as a contribution to a discussion between research and practice with a view to it contributing to the evaluation of practice in its own terms.

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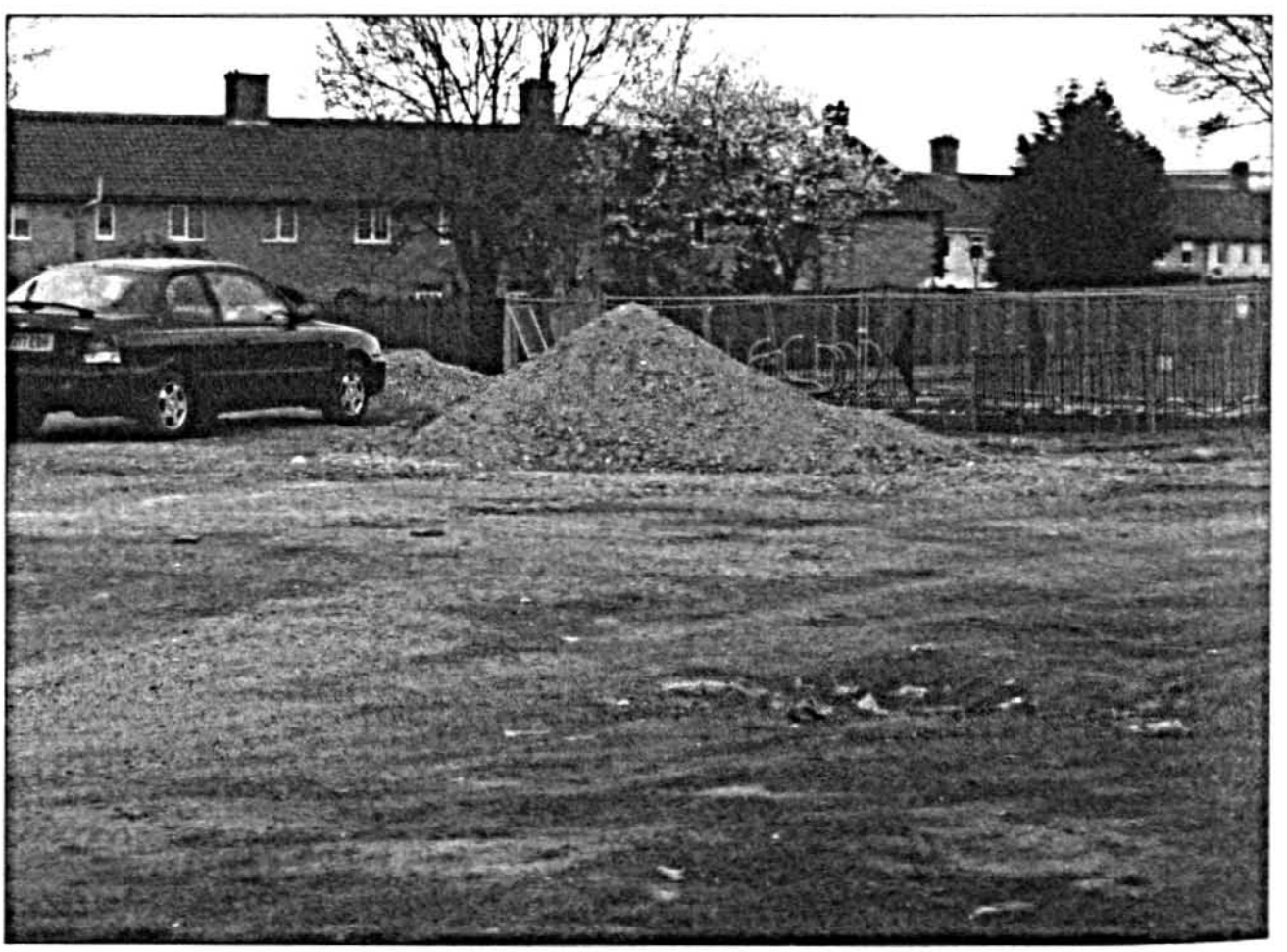
Appendix 1:

Photo Walks

The photographs in this appendix were taken by young people who as one aspect of the research were asked to photograph places which were meaningful to them. The researcher, and sometimes a youth worker, accompanied the young people during this exercise, and conversations developed in relation to the places chosen for the photographs.

The following are extracts from those conversations:



Di: *This used to be the pod site - where they would set-up during the holidays. They're building a children's playground on it now.*
Youth worker: *Is there anything for the older kids?*
Di: *Bench!*

We used to sometimes go in the petrol station to fill out Keyfund forms. There's a table and some chairs just inside on the left.

Di: *We got moved from the bench so we ended up by the park.*
Youth worker: *I didn't like that.*
Researcher: *Why?*
Youth worker: *Not safe - dark, secluded, lots of undergrowth - so I got them all personal alarms.*
Di: *I've still got mine... That's where the bench was - that gap.*
Youth worker: *That's where we first met Di.*

Di: *We used to meet Rob and Grace at the chippy, to fill in Keyfund applications.*
Researcher: *I don't see any seats in there.*
Di: *No. There's a ledge just under the window - we sat on that.*

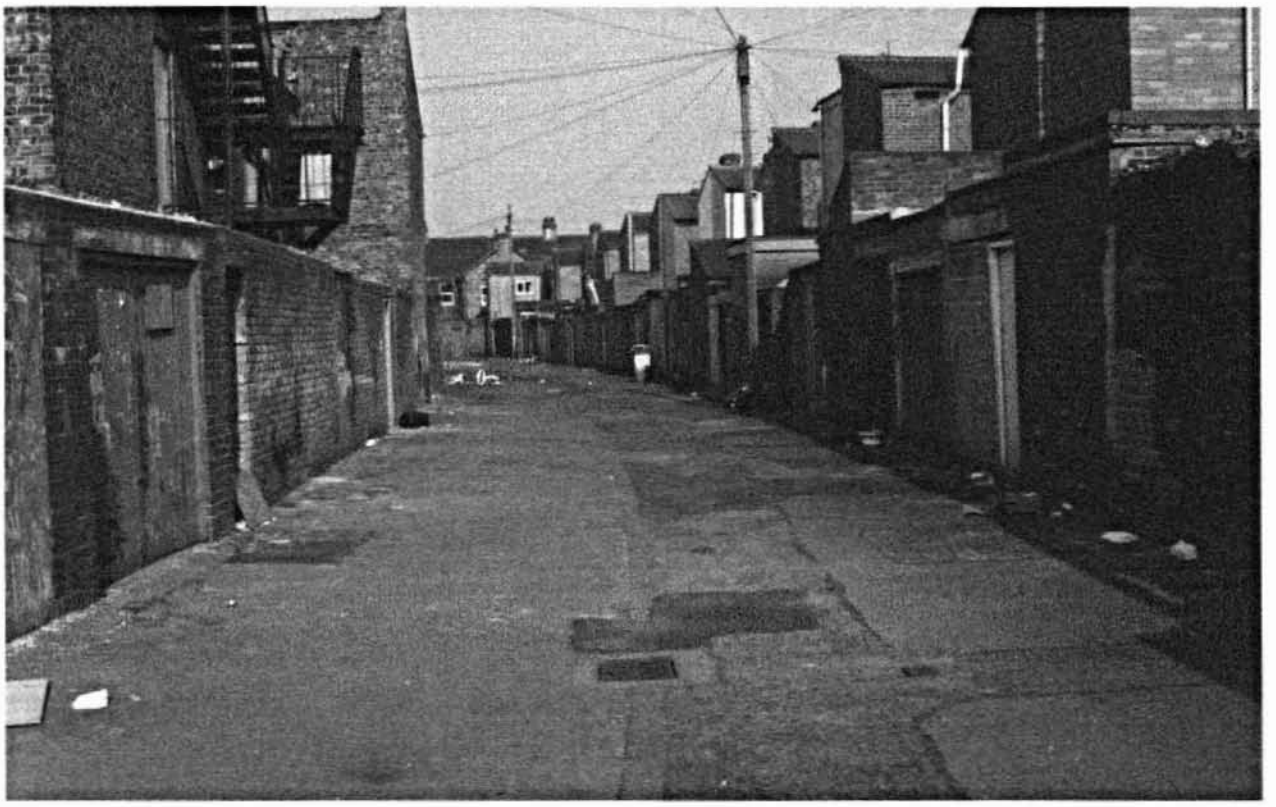
A couple of us went in there to roll a joint once

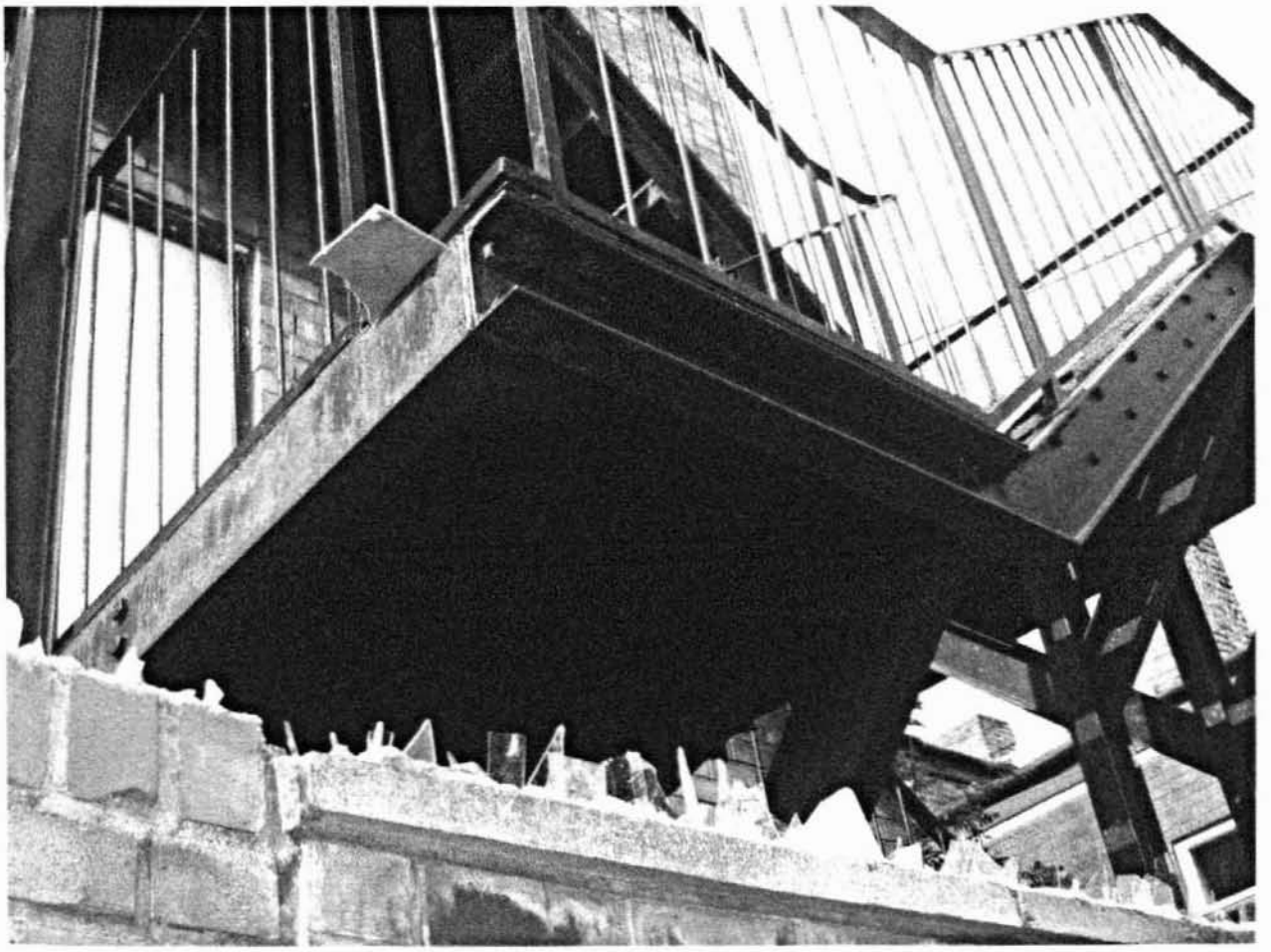
Youth worker: *Kids come in here to just, you know, chill out.*

Some people come down here - it's a bit out of the way... though there are some people living in the flats there. Someone set fire to the fence once

(Community centre)
Researcher: *Do you ever go in there?*
J: *No, this fella came out of there once and started having a go at us*
Researcher: *Was there any reason for that?*
J: *Someone was kicking the ball off the wall, and he came out and started racially abusing us*

That's my mum's friend's shop - she talks to us, she's ok.





J: *Let's get some pictures of the ghetto!*
There's been a lot of trouble down here at times - gangs, you know.

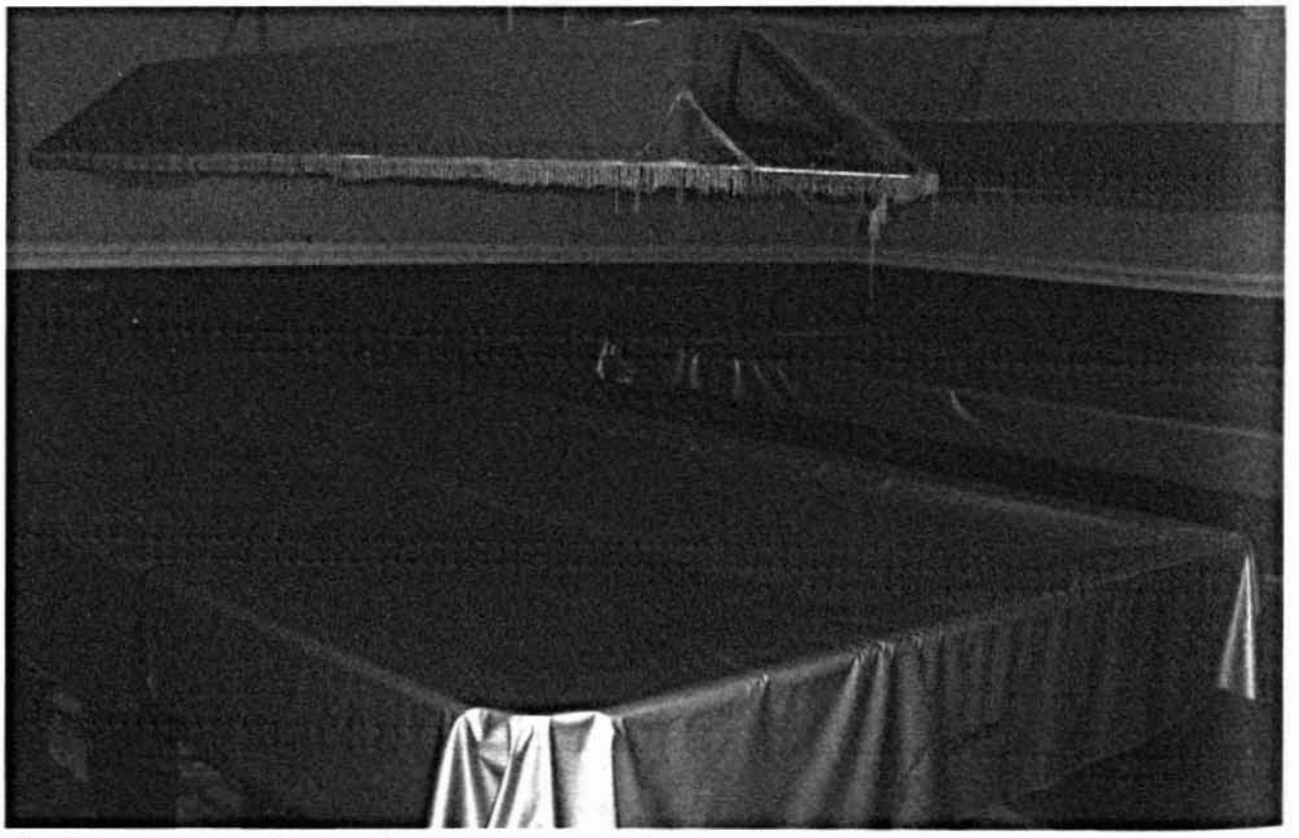
This is my house - the druggies use the phone box; one time there was this guy who was on something and he just tore it apart; they're always hanging around round here

J: *This is where I get my hair cut - you should get yours cut*
Researcher: *You're right, but not today thanks.*
J: *It's only three quid*

We play snooker in there sometimes

We used to play football down the side of the Co-op. They used to tell us to move, but it's alright now because it's closed down.

This is the community centre - where they have the raves. They've stopped now because of a fight.



They've opened up the snooker room to us - as long as we don't mess about, but we don't because a lot of Dads come down here.

I live down there. We moved in about four years ago. I wasn't looking forward to moving but it only took about two weeks for us to feel settled.

This is the park. There's not really any more places - just houses.

That pub is right in the centre of the village. It used to be open but I think it went out of business.

Appendix 2:

Transcript of a focus group discussion amongst youth workers about evaluation and accountability

Jim: *I think there is definitely a big pressure in terms of funders, and there's a lot of stuff about outcomes, and we're under pressure to go outcome led and it takes away a lot of freedom, you know, you're not working with young people where they are at, there's an outcome you have to tick at the end of it, people have to get jobs, people have to move on, that sort of thing. And there's a pressure to report back to funders on lots of their objectives and there's a game that goes on. I see a game that is going on, we get young people to tell us how good we are, and then we tell funders how good young people think we are.*

Kerry: *Do you not think that in some ways that, them saying you have to have an objective, or something, writing out your aims and objectives for the programme in some way that's improving your youth work? Because you're seeing at the end if you've met your aims and your objectives?*

Jim: *If the young people are setting the objectives, or if we are setting the objectives, it's some civil servant setting the objectives for a group of young people that I really struggle with, but also sometimes the objective might be, we're just going to go here, we're going to go here and see where we go, and we're not going to say, lets not put ourselves under pressure to get, to pass some sort of test at the end of it, or to get a job or whatever, let just go, let's just come down every week and go with something here and just work on it. And there's loads of freedom, there's loads of creativity in that. But I definitely think there's a big game goes on with all of this. Reporting back to funders and evaluating things.*

Kay: *There has to be, in this big, bad work we live in, there has to be.*

Jim: *It doesn't make it right though?*

Kay: *But there has to be some sort of formal system, because we're a voluntary charity organisation, we have to probably prove more, that we are worth while. Very much we've always said we're qualitative work, and that to me is just a face, because you always have to prove your stats at the end of it. So you know, how can you support quality on youth work when you have to prove it or back it up with statistics? That does not show quality youth work, that just shows that you are good at creative evaluations?*

Jim: *Are you saying that statistics prove quality?*

Kay: *No, that's what it has to do for funders, funders want statistics- they don't want quality.*

Jim: *But that doesn't mean that it's ...at the end of the day there could be loads of organisations out there in [city name] doing loads of damage to young people. And they are reporting back to funders*

Kay: *I'm sure you could name a few ...*

Jim: *Mega statistics to make them look great, or is that- so that's OK then? That's the way it has to be?*

Kay: *No it's not OK, but it's the way it is, it's a game, it's like you said, it's a game.*

Frank: *So do you accept that then?*

Kim: *But if you could...*

Kay: *No I don't accept that, but that's the way it is and that's the way it has to be.*

Frank: *So it has to be like that, so you accept it?*

Kay: *What ... are we as one going to change it?*

Frank: *No but we can not accept it.*

Kay: *We can accept it or we won't get the funding.*

Kerry: *Yeah, you won't get the funding for the project.*

Frank: *So you accept it?*

Kerry: *No, because in this day and age you have to, like you're studying at the moment, you have assignments to do, you have to write a report, you have to make it look, so many words, look brilliant, you know and get good marks on it, it's the same sort of thing.*

Jim: *The truth is ... sorry*

Kerry: *You have to prove that your youth work is good youth work, because you can't just take it word of mouth of staff or young people.*

Frank: *So the statistics prove everything then?*

Sharon: *Not necessarily through statistics*

Kerry: *I'm just saying, like, that survey I've just done I think it's great because [funder] will give us more money at the end of it, even though it's statistics and it looks like black and white paper, and a few graphs, but if it gets us more money to do more programmes, then that's great, that's what we want, that's what we need, because we can't survive without it.*

Jim: *So youth works about getting money in? Jumping through hoops? That's what youth work's about?*

Kerry: *No, it's not about getting money, but it's about surviving in a harsh world where you have to compete with other organisations.*

Jim: *To do anything for money?*
(Laughter- reactions talking over each other)

Danny: *But that's not true, because, you can have, it doesn't have to be either or, you can find a balance. Like, and it's about, I mean everybody here is working on and thinking about new ways to evaluate things, new ways to make it better, like from our point of view, while still trying to jump through the hoops to get the money. But we're still trying to ... Like there's a lot of people doing research and things like that, trying to do, research on evaluation that going to go right across the board, you know, different people doing different things, trying to find some sort of way of liaising between how funders need to have their statistics to justify the money that they give and how we can say, well this is more accurate of what we do rather than some bullshit story that we are telling. Just so we can get some money.*

Frank: *I went round a, let me give you an example, when I'm thinking, let me think here what I'm trying to say. (Laugher) I'm just going to talk here (laughter). I went down to a boxing club last night and I used to box in the place I went to and I was helping coach some younger kids, and they're all 11 and 12 and there was other coaches there, but (unclear- accent! 47:19) and I was in there teaching a couple of lads and we got into this whole discussion with about 10 of them, about smoking, and they were all 11 and 12, just starting first year. And they were saying they were starting to smoke and all that, so, we had this whole fucking discussion for about 20 minutes about smoking and about health and about boxing and all that there. And I went out of that and was thinking I was doing youth work in there, you know what I mean, there was no money, there was no funding, there was no hoops, there was no evaluation, but I was doing some fucking good youth work there. I was talking about, there was some sort of education going on in there, some sort of learning, going on about health, about boxing, about smoking and going on to drugs and about drinking and all that there. I didn't jump through any hoops, I didn't do anything, so you can do youth work with out money. That's the point I'm trying to get at.*

Danny: *You can do it voluntarily, totally.*
(Laughter)

Frank: *You can do it voluntarily, you can do it, you can just do youth work.*

Kim: *You can do it, but you'll not get a job!*

Frank: *Yes, wherever you are.*

Kim: *But you'll not have a job. You can do it in your everyday life, day to day, you can do a bit of youth work, but you'll not make a living!*

Jim: *Ever since we've been asked anything about what is good youth work, what about our jobs, and about us and about professionalism? Because we're about young people and journeys and young people's development and stuff, but really it's about us, and jobs.*

Kim: *It's not though (agreement). You do have to meet those targets, like we have specific targets we need to meet in terms of numbers, we have to do it, we just have to do it to have our project going. But we always try to put in individual stories and then it all, like the skate park and the dancers, and we try to give funders like little stories as well, so we're not just firing figures at them, but we are sort of giving them a bit more personal stuff as well.*

Jim: *I think the point that I'm raising is that there is a culture of us taking money for anything, and I'm scared that in Northern Ireland we are going the way of Connexions, in England, where we become something other than youth workers, we start to look like*
Kay: Social services

Kerry: *But then that's up to the staff to not let that happen*

Frank: *And not accept that*

Kay: *To find the balance, like we were on about, finding, like getting the money but being able to the quality youth work, that we want to do*

Sharon: *But it is extremely hard through. Like we have one funder at the minute, that basically when I explained the programme that I was doing to him, it's an outdoor programme, and he just kept saying, 'but I want to come and see a workshop, I want to come and see a work shop.' But I'm saying, 'It isn't inside, I'm not doing workshops. This is an outdoors programme.' And it's kind of caused hassle, it's caused problems because we are not fitting in with what he expects us to do. You know, he's like a community relations funder and he wants to see community relations and citizenship happening in an environment where young people are sitting talking about things, but none of the young people we work with, they just wouldn't do that, so you need to be more creative and think of some other way to sort of get the citizenship values across to them in a different way. In a way that suits them. And I explained that to him but he's still beating on about wanting to come and see a workshop. So, like, there's push and pull, and some funders are probably, they feel that they have all the power and that they can just go out and tell you what you should be doing. And there does need to be some sort of feedback coming up from us, you know, down on the ground, you know, they need to listen to us more. There is a culture of bending over backwards and doing anything.*

Kay: *But I think that's also the point that Jim made, that civil servants don't understand the job that we do, they're not youth workers, they don't tend to be, they don't want to know. They're*

looking for cost benefit, cost benefit analysis, they're looking at the quick fix, they're looking at short term and they're looking at what election time is coming up. What can I stand by? And that's what they do and they don't understand the process of evaluation, and they don't understand it's a long process, you can't sustain billions or millions of numbers doing what you do. It's small, focus based youth work, it takes quite a long time. But they don't understand that, they want to see results.

Danny: *That's why I think it is really helpful that there are people researching how to make evaluation better, and how to make this liaising between funders and people on the ground better. Because we don't have time to jump through all the hoops and figure out exactly how we can communicate to do that.*

Sharon: *How we can change our programmes to suit them.*

Danny: *So, and they don't have time to come to us and be with us and do our job with us, so I don't think there's any other way than having somebody in the middle, kind of help both of us figure out how we can make it all work. I mean I haven't seen anything yet that's there, but I think people are consciously working towards that a lot more. Even though it's not done yet.*