



# DETACHED YOUTH WORK

APPROVED BY:

Directors

LAST REVIEWED:

07/07/22

NEXT REVIEW:

07/07/23

## Introduction

The purpose of this policy is twofold, firstly it sets out to explain the rationale behind Detached Youth Work and secondly, clarify its role as one of a number of specialist approaches to working with young people.

It offers a framework against which all detached youth work practice will be developed and implemented within Community Court Yard and is intended to be used by detached youth workers and their managers as a tool for developing good practice with 'harder to reach' young people.

The policy will also help to inform the development of partnerships and collaborative working initiatives.

## The Aims of Detached Youth Work

Working within an informal education framework, the basic aim of detached youth work is:

To make contact with young people (having particular regard for those for whom existing opportunities are not appropriate) on their own territory and on their own terms – in order to facilitate and support them in identifying and addressing their own issues, concerns, interests and aspirations.

In a nutshell, detached youth work is:

- A planned approach to delivering informal education and learning opportunities. Based upon effective working relationships, commitment and a positive regard for young people.
- On young peoples terms
- Where young people choose
- At young peoples pace
- When young people choose
- About issues that they identify as important.
- Not dependant on a building base.
- Open to all young people (particularly, though not exclusively those who most experience the effects of social exclusion) who are contacted on the streets or through other voluntary involvement.
- A developmental process.
- Responsive to community needs.

It most definitely is not:

- Just hanging out on street corners or wandering around aimlessly.
- Policing young people or moving them on.
- Trouble shooting for its own sake.
- A cheap or easy youth work option.
- A quick fix/gap filling process.
- Outreach work (i.e. an extension of building based provision).
- Licence for youth workers to impose themselves on young people.
- Effective if it operates in isolation from other service provision.

## Service Delivery

As individuals, detached youth workers draw upon their own personal experiences and possess and develop personal qualities that enable them to form effective working relationships with young people that are largely free from institutional barriers.

Detached youth workers may operate on young peoples home ground, on the streets, on waste ground, parks and open spaces, in cafes and pubs and so on, but their role is still that of informal educator and their work is grounded within the framework of the youth work curriculum.

In developing their practice, detached youth workers have to become part of the 'scene' by gaining young peoples acceptance and trust. Once this has been established, only the resources available limit the potential for innovative and effective youth work. However, gaining that acceptance and trust can be hard, it takes time and can be all too easily undermined.

It is also important to get the balance right between 'hanging around' work with young people where they congregate and more focussed work with groups and individuals. It is worth remembering that making contact with young people on their own ground is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Engaging young people in purposeful activities, in identifying and addressing their own needs and aspirations and in exploiting learning opportunities is the crux of effective education based detached youth work practice.

## Operational Issues

Before setting up a detached youth work project, the purpose and what is to be achieved, needs to be considered carefully. How was the decision arrived at? Has an options analysis been carried out (to ensure that detached youth work is the most effective method of reaching young people)? How will it relate to other provision in the area?

Once the decision has been reached that detached youth work will be the most effective youth work intervention for achieving identified objectives, then the following needs to be borne in mind.

In setting up and managing detached youth work projects there are a number of minimum requirements that are prerequisite to good practice. Central to this is the fact that detached youth work is not a cheap option and if it is to be effective, then it needs to be resourced appropriately.

In recognition of this, the following guidelines outline the minimum standards in which detached youth workers will be expected to operate.

## Work Base

Community Court Yard recognises that any detached youth work team needs a base from which to operate and such a base should be a suitable standard and be fully compliant with established Health & Safety policies and regulations.

As a minimum requirement, the work base should have:

- A means of independent access at times when the host organisation might otherwise be closed.
- A desk/workstation.
- A telephone (preferably with exclusive use).
- A lockable filing cabinet.
- Access to stationary (including stamps).
- Storage space for resources.
- Sufficient space for team meetings, group work sessions etc.

## Administrative Support

Detached youth workers will have access to:

- A postal address.
- An effective and confidential message taking/retrieving system.
- Word processing and reprographic facilities.
- Refreshment facilities.
- Toilet and washroom facilities.
- Somewhere secure to leave personal effects.

## Working Sessions

The particular strength of detached youth work is that unlike many building based projects, it is not tied to fixed operating times, which means that on occasion, workers will need to be flexible in their working patterns. However, this does not give managers or detached youth workers licence to chop and change working hours at will, but means that they will need to agree working patterns that take into consideration the needs of the service to be responsive and flexible, with any commitments and responsibilities that workers have outside of work.

Changing shift patterns need to be agreed in consultation between managers and detached youth workers, as far in advance as necessary to accommodate availability and personal commitments.

The delivery of detached youth work interventions, which might take place away from the public gaze, means that it is essential for managers and workers to establish both a relationship of trust and transparent systems of accountability. Each project will also be expected to ensure that mechanisms are in place within their locality, that maximise opportunities for young people and their wider community to play a major role in defining the work, identifying targets and evaluating its effectiveness.

Detached youth workers will often find themselves working in sensitive situations, such as those involving truancy, petty crime, drugs and alcohol use, anti-social behaviour etc. Therefore, managers overseeing detached youth work will need to recognise their responsibilities and duty of care in relation to their staff and the trust inherent in the work.

## Planning and Preparation

Detached youth work if it is to be effective, needs to have a clear purpose, aims and objectives. Consequently, (as is the case in all good youth work practice) the aim of each detached session will be clearly identified and agreed in advance of each session and should be designed to offer a broad range of learning opportunities as described within the 'Youth Work Curriculum' framework and 'Youth Work Strategy'.

Given that detached youth work is intended to be responsive to change, regular planning and evaluation meetings need to be programmed in, so that emerging trends and issues can be considered and if appropriate, new priorities agreed.

Managers responsible for detached youth work must provide each worker with the appropriate tools to carry out their work as professionals. The following list, though not exhaustive has been identified as the minimum basic requirement necessary for this purpose.

- Identification Badge.
- A torch.
- A mobile phone.
- A detailed map of the area.
- Waterproof clothing.
- Notebook and pen.
- Home and work contact numbers of their manager and/or other identified persons, for contact in an emergency.

## Defining the area

In conjunction with the project/line manager the overall geographical area/s in which the team will operate need to be clearly identified, agreed upon and appropriate risk assessments undertaken.

## Reconnaissance

The aim of reconnaissance is to allow detached youth workers to familiarise themselves with their 'patch'. The process includes gathering information, compiling a community profile, making observations and networking with other agencies. It allows the project/worker to begin the process of identifying priorities and time to identify potential partners for future work, without undue pressure to start 'achieving' or 'producing'.

Reconnaissance is an essential prerequisite to good detached youth work, as it allows for a true picture of the area to be gained, which will then feed into the project's long-term aims and objectives.

Only when the reconnaissance has been completed, is it possible to prioritise the precise geographical area to be worked, which young people will be targeted and what issues are going to inform service delivery initiatives and curriculum content.

The time needed for reconnaissance needs to be agreed between detached youth workers and their manager and will need to take into account a number of factors such as time availability for the task, the size of the area to be worked, the nature of issues to be addressed and the particular circumstances of the target group. The process of reconnaissance and 'contact' with young people are not mutually exclusive.

Indeed soliciting the views of young people and seeing the area through their eyes is an important aspect of reconnaissance. This said, as part of the management process, detached youth workers and their managers will have to agree precisely the 'right' time to start engaging with young people.

Reconnaissance also offers the opportunity for detached youth workers to begin to raise the profile of the project by 'having a presence' on the streets. Word of mouth is by far the best kind of publicity, so it is important for workers to be seen. Spending time doing this, without undue pressure to engage with young people, enables workers to get a feel for the neighbourhood and its geography.

Detached youth workers often describe the information gleaned through the process of reconnaissance as either 'hard' or 'soft'. Broadly speaking, 'hard' information is objective and is comprised of statistical data such as socio-economic factors, whilst 'soft' information is subjective and comprised of anecdotal knowledge and observations.

### Health and Safety

Whilst everyone is responsible for Health and Safety, staff and their employers have particular legal responsibilities which are outlined in the Community Court Yard's Health and Safety policies and procedures.

Risk Assessment and Hazard management are perhaps the most obvious aspects of Health and Safety that have a bearing on detached youth work. Consequently, prior to any "street work" commencing, a detailed risk assessment should be carried out, with any potential risks to health identified and control measures introduced to keep such risks to a minimum. An example of a risk assessment for detached youth work and ensuing control measures can be found in the Appendices.

Some of the factors that need to be taken into consideration include, the built environment in which detached workers will be operating, for example, hiding places for potential assailants, empty/vandalised buildings, broken glass, discarded sharps/drugs paraphernalia, secluded walkways/alleyways, dead end/cul-de-sacs, heavy traffic, under passes etc; evidence of drug dealing, soliciting, "gang warfare", public disorder issues, assaults, weapons related incidents, arson attacks etc (the Local Policing Unit and/or the Council's Community Safety Team may be able to provide statistics relating to these matters, on either a post code or police beat basis). And finally, due consideration needs to be given to the general demeanour of the young people to be worked with.

After this assessment of the contextual circumstances and vulnerability of staff has been carried out, operating guidelines should be drawn up, with workers being fully briefed as to the rationale behind them and their roles and responsibilities in adhering to them

At the very least, the following guidelines and working practices should be adhered to:  
When undertaking "street work" sessions, detached youth workers will:

- Never operate with less than two workers and always in sight of each other.
- Inform their line manager of the specific locations and times to be worked.
- Always carry their Identification Badge with them.
- Avoid attracting unnecessary attention by wearing/carrying valuables.
- Under no circumstances transport young people in their own vehicles alone or allow themselves to be carried in vehicles driven by the young people with whom they work.
- Always carry the mobile phone provided in case of an emergency.
- Not take unnecessary risks and recognise their own and their colleagues limitations.
- Always work within the law and within the Community Court Yard's policies and procedures.
- Bring Health and Safety matters and other concerns to the attention of their line manager, so that appropriate risk assessments/action can be carried out

### Consent Cards

The consent card is an effective way of enabling young people to take part in activities. It removes the necessity of having to repeatedly fill out consent forms for those young people who are a regular part of a group. The card is a one off application giving permission for a young person to take part in any of the local activities set up by a detached team with the exception of over-night stays or residential and some specialist activities.

To get a Consent Card:

The young person needs to take a consent card application form, covering letter and blank consent card, which are given to a parent/guardian. It must be emphasised that the forms are completed and signed by a parent/guardian

Completed forms need to be returned to the full-time worker or worker in charge. If the form is fully completed and signed it can then be filed, if not completed it will be sent back. An additional letter will also be sent to the parent/guardian to say that the card has been issued together with a copy of the application form to check the details are right. The letter will also invite parents/guardians to get in contact should any details on the application form change.

Use of Card:

No Card - No Go.

Unless a young person has a completed consent form for the specific activity.

Consent cards - would not cover any over night or specialist activities. A separate consent form would be issued for such events. Workers should maintain a file of consent details.

These should be taken on activities in the event that the information is needed. (This means details of cardholders and one-off consent forms).

However, workers must ensure that the information is not misused and remains confidential. A six-monthly review/update of consent form information should be established. The Consent Card system is adapted from Rotherham Detached Youth Work Team and is commended by 'Her Majesty's Inspectorate'.