

State of the Voluntary Youth and Children's Sector 2019



Produced by
Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services
the specialist youth infrastructure organisation
in Staffordshire



Introduction



This is the story of Staffordshire's voluntary youth sector since the last state of the sector report published by SCVYS in 2013, set in the national context of austerity, Britain deciding to leave the European Union and significant reductions in Government funding into the local public sector.

During July 2019, in every-day conversations with a dozen or more local Chief Officers of voluntary organisations every single one expressed in authentic terms that the current environment is "the toughest they have ever experienced."

The support system for children and young people is cracking, and so are the people who make it work. Unless national policy direction significantly changes soon it is merely a question of which cracks first. Although this report focuses on the voluntary youth sector, the sense is that this picture is reflected across public services and is also true of adult support services.



In this incredibly challenging environment, one can only imagine how much worse things would be for children, young people and families if there was no voluntary youth sector providing both universal and early intervention services as well as a significant safety net for those falling through the cracks in the support system.

With the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review postponed until autumn 2020, it is important over the coming months to: **(1)** amplify both the voice of young people and the voluntary sector in reference to the current pressures and challenges; **(2)** identify what needs

to be done to properly invest in creating a thriving environment for our children and young people and **(3)** enable them to maximise their personal and generational potential.

National Context



The last 6 years have been dominated by the Government's austerity programme which has made significant cuts to public sector budgets, subsequently having a knock-on effect in the local voluntary sector. Local authorities (libraries, youth services, children's centres, SEND, etc.), schools, police, fire and health all suggest significant reductions in real term funding, often aligned to both increased demand and complexity adversely impacting on high cost service areas.

This is further reinforced by the national figures attributed to this disinvestment and the subsequent impact of **austerity on young people nationally:**

- **£422.3m:** The reduction in spending on services for young people in the last six years
- **3,500:** The number of local authority youth service jobs lost since 2010
- **600:** The number of youth centres closed since 2010
- **130,000:** The number of places in local authority run youth centres lost since 2010
- **199,752:** Total Police numbers (the same as in 2003), but 18% fewer than 2010.

Enough key stakeholders have never been convinced about youth work and that the outcomes it produces, while difficult to fully evidence, are significant, long-lasting and massively cost effective. Perhaps as a result, this is why youth work has bounced around Government departments from Education to Cabinet Office and most recently into Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

However, with the significant rise in youth violence and knife crime in particular being causally linked to the severe reduction or complete removal of youth services in some areas, the pendulum of opinion is swinging back and the stock value of youth work is once again on the rise.

The Government's priorities for young people since 2010 have been focused on employability, voice and social action, including a significant investment into the National Citizen Service programme. This high profile, short-term intervention, undoubtedly provides positive developmental experiences for many participants albeit in a narrow age bracket, but is costly when compared to supporting young people of a wider age range all year round through locally delivered relational youth support services.



Numerous national reports point to increases in child poverty, evidenced by growing use of food banks, demand on mental health support services and higher rates of homelessness revealing the harsh reality of life for many in our communities. It is often the local voluntary and community sector who are the first to respond to these localised needs.

Locally Burton YMCA have seen a large increase in the need for family mediation services, foodbank (1,817 people supported with emergency food parcels in the first 7 months of 2019, 424 under 18s), furniture recycling scheme as well as a greater complexity of need for individuals within their housing support services.

What are children, young people and parents saying nationally?



The headline findings from a recent Action for Children report are:

- Most commonly grandparents (62%), parents (60%) and children (34%) say childhoods today are getting worse.
- Young people say the top three barriers to a good childhood today are: "Being bullied" (61%), "Too much pressure from school" (60%) and "Too much pressure to fit in and look a certain way" (55%).
- More than two-thirds of parents (67%) and more than half of grandparents (58%) think the government is investing too little in childhoods
- 79% of children and young people are "very" or "fairly" happy.

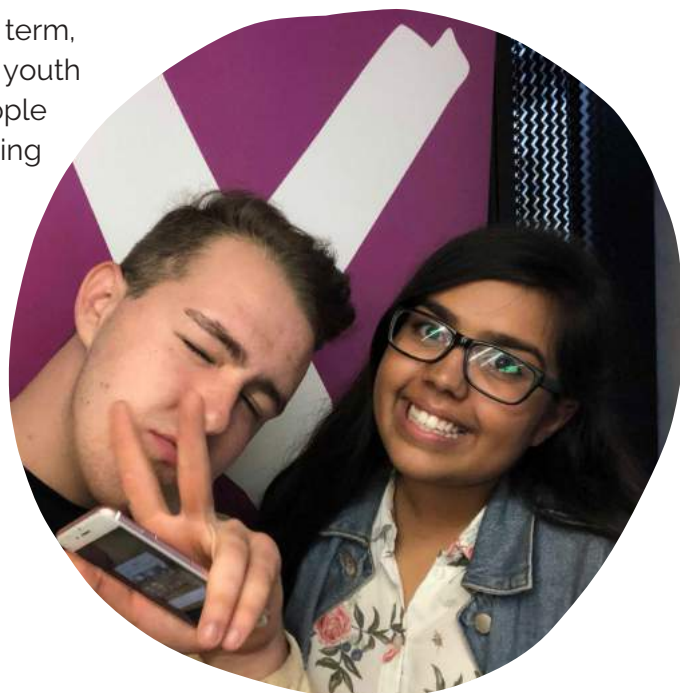
The Local Government Association (LGA) response to these findings was:

“ It is essential that the Government heeds the consistent and increasingly urgent warnings that children’s services are now at a tipping point, and uses the upcoming Spending Review to deliver a long-term strategy that enables councils to ensure that all children can have the bright futures they deserve. ”

Barnardo's has published research suggesting there is a '**poverty of hope**' amongst young people, with **69%** of 16 - 24 year olds surveyed saying they think their generation will have lower rates of happiness and mental health than older generations, and fears including climate change, house prices, job insecurity and Brexit. Barnardo's recommendations include:

- Children and adolescent mental health services are in need of urgent and sustained investment
- The Government should commit to increasing investment in community youth work and safe spaces for young people to provide targeted early intervention in vulnerable communities
- The Government should commit to funding a long term, multi-agency strategy to tackle the root causes of youth violence. This approach should provide young people access to housing and a route into education, training and employment, to help them secure a brighter future.

The Royal Society of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce in publishing their 'Teenagency' report in August 2018 sought to understand more about the motivation and perceived ability of young people to make a difference in their communities and how creative they see themselves as being. The opinions of young people aged 14-18 were also compared with those of adults. A summary of their key findings is as follows:



- Young people's participation in social action significantly outweighs adult perception: **68%** of young people have participated in volunteering or other forms of social action, but just **5%** of adults think that young people today are very likely to do social action.
- Some demographic groups are more likely to participate in social action than others: **74%** of young women are somewhat more likely to volunteer compared to **61%** of young men.
- Young people today have a strong desire to help others but many do not feel like they can make a difference: **84%** of young people want to help others but only **52%** believe that they can make a positive difference in their communities.
- Young people from less affluent backgrounds especially need the encouragement of schools to participate in social action.
- We need to provide more opportunities for young people to shape social action activities: young people welcome the opportunity to shape the social action they participate in, but currently, only **24%** of young people who have ever volunteered have had the chance to select the problem they want to help to solve.

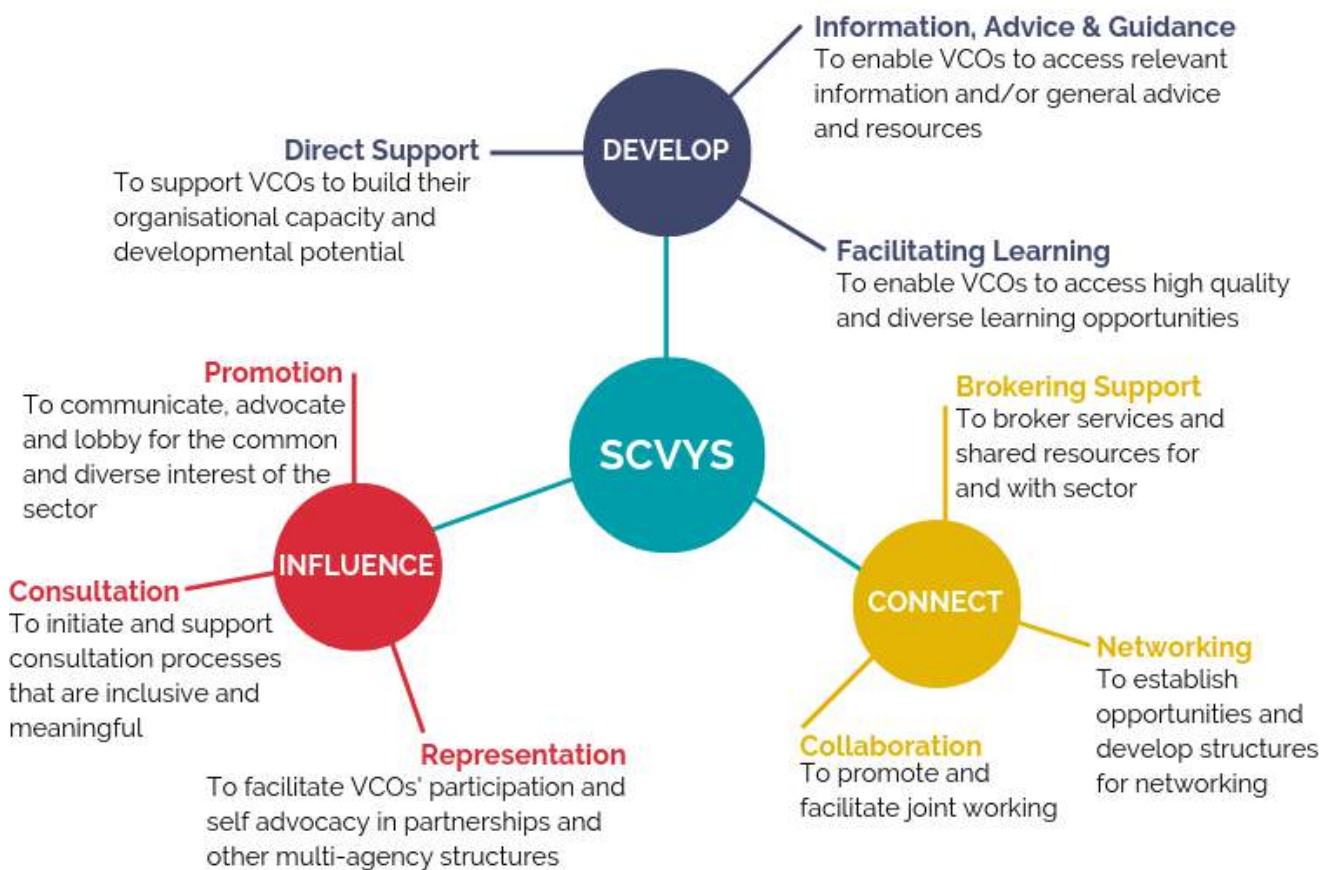
<https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/teenagency.pdf>

Staffordshire Environment: The value of infrastructure



The landscape has changed massively with the closure of Staffordshire County Council's £6 million in-house Youth Service in 2014, the disappearance of Connexions as an Information, Advice and Guidance service around careers (and so much more) and reductions in capacity across targeted youth work and Youth Offending Services. These reductions have placed a high level of expectation at the door of the voluntary sector, which has responded with amazing resilience, tenacity and creativity, and in which infrastructure support services have played an important role.

SCVYS uses the Value of Infrastructure Model devised by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations and the National Lottery Fund as illustrated below:



SCVYS values, supports and champions the local voluntary sector as they in turn strengthen local communities. Specifically, the focus of support is on individuals and organisations working with children, young people and families.

Since August 2016, SCVYS has helped the local youth sector to access or generate almost £7 million of funding through use of the GRANTfinder tool, holding local funding fairs and proactive bespoke support.



SCVYS does this by providing practical **face-to-face support** in a variety of different ways. The team of development staff really know the sector and their geographical areas, and using their wealth of experience are able to help with everything from the very beginnings of an organisation forming through to business plans and major funding bids.

Using an outcomes star approach to organisational health, SCVYS is able to help groups to look ahead, take appropriate and timely actions that strengthen and build capacity as well as avoid potential crises. Alongside the supportive relationship, SCVYS provides **training, news updates, information, advice and guidance** and the reassurance of a telephone helpline.

In addition to the **direct support** for local organisations, SCVYS also acts as a **sector representative** at strategic partnership boards, is a conduit of **consultation and engagement**, and actively promotes and publicises the contribution of both individual organisations as well as the sector as a whole.

SCVYS supported the development of a collaborative bid to deliver the East Staffordshire Diversionary Activities programme, addressing local anti-social behaviour hotspots. Three member organisations are working together and have just secured a second year of funding meaning a total of £120,000 will have been invested in a range of diversionary activities such as an indoor skate park facility and, detached and outreach projects.

SCVYS is also facilitating a “Community Enabler” consortium of nine organisations to handhold eligible people into support services around employability, childcare and debt management.

Everything SCVYS offers is designed to enable organisations to be stronger, safer and more sustainable in the way they operate, thereby building overall capacity into the voluntary sector. Our annual census of member groups shows the impact of this work over a prolonged period of time.

Year	2013	2017	2018	2019
SCVYS Members	96	155	170	201
Regular Participation*	19,092	27,658	28,479	31,494
Volunteer Workforce**	5,912	9,242	9,631	10,215
Paid Workforce	253	613	903	840

*SCVYS has always counted regular weekly participation of 5-25 year olds. Since 2017, we have counted 0-25s due to our involvement across the whole Children’s System Transformation.

**The way we calculate volunteer workforce has evolved since 2011, counting filled roles rather than just individuals. We gather data on Young Volunteers, Committee Members and Adults who volunteer regularly and occasionally.

SCVYS administered 642 Enhanced DBS checks for local staff and volunteers and facilitated access to 624 training places for Safeguarding and Early Help through the local safeguarding children board. SCVYS also supported over 200 organisations with information, advice and guidance, including updating their safeguarding policy framework in light of Working Together (2018).

Joining up the local support system via a place-based approach has been critical in ensuring that at a time when resources are scarce, **everyone is more aware of what everybody else is doing**, and therefore the system works more effectively. There are very real risks of shunting demand through inappropriate or misleading referrals, meaning that rather than dealing with root causes and issues, cases can bounce around the system.

As public services have retreated to the higher tier of needs (Tier 3 and 4), the definition of what constitutes multiple and complex need in the case of a referral has evolved to the point of requiring significant evidence before being accepted. When aligned to increased levels of overall demand and reduced resources to be able to respond across the system, a perfect storm is created resulting in some children, young people and families being let down by the system designed to support them.

In this environment, the need to support a best possible start in life, maintaining a good level of development at every stage is critical. Evidence shows that once children of school age fall behind, the likelihood of closing the gap on their peers is low. If the opportunity to identify needs at the earliest possible stage is missed, then education needs to be given the necessary additional resource and capacity to help those who need it.

Without investment in preventative and early intervention services in mental health, the level of need has risen to tidal wave proportions, and is impacting on every service. The 24-7 nature of social media engagement, meaning little respite or escape from the various pressures this exerts, alongside a portrayal of "body ideal" by media, advertising and celebrity culture creates an unattainable perfection for **95%** of young people who are left to manage this on their own.

Through voluntary sector **representation** on the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board and Families Strategic Partnership, SCVYS has been able to **influence** a nuanced approach to Early Help services to include earliest help. While this is a sensible approach that other local authorities are now exploring, it too adds pressure to the system as the voluntary and community sector are now the go-to places for Tier 2 interventions. Theoretically this is a single, additional need, but in reality, the single additional need often reveals multiple and complex dimensions requiring multiple interventions.



A siloed approach from Government to emerging issues of vulnerability such as child sexual exploitation, gangs and serious violence, County Lines, Female Genital Mutilation, etc. has created reactive and isolated interventions seeking to address a single issue. A system-wide response to vulnerability involving a whole-family approach and addressing root cause at a community level would surely be more effective and less costly.



Local Youth Voice



Youth Voice is another area where the voluntary sector has stepped up to fill a gap locally, and SCVYS is leading on creating greater collaboration, better alignment and increased quality with a range of partners under a work strand requested by the Families Strategic Partnership.

Following the closure of the local authority youth service in 2014, SCVYS was contracted to redesign and reinstate mechanisms that capture the voices of children, young people and families. With minimal resource, SCVYS started by reintroducing the UK Youth Parliament programme to the county, and 4 young people were elected in 2017. They quickly realised that they needed mechanisms to help them engage and consult with those they sought to represent, and so a Countywide youth council called Staffordshire Youth Union was established in 2018. This forum continues to grow and expand, both numerically and in influence, making links with school councils, other existing youth forums and also encouraging the formation of new forums such as Uttoxeter and Rugeley Youth Councils.



The annual youth consultation, 'Make Your Mark' in both 2017 and 2018, put Mental Health as the top concern for Staffordshire's young people (11-18s), and Staffordshire Youth Union have developed campaigns to bring about local changes across three main priority areas including Mental Health, Knife Crime and the Environment.

Youth voice delivered by the voluntary sector has begun to be embedded within local authority decision making. Young people's voice has contributed to successful bids within the County Council, securing funding for additional support in Staffordshire.

Staffordshire has undoubtedly mitigated the impact of this environment more effectively than some other local authority areas. The work of SCVYS as an infrastructure body through a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategic Partner contract, as well as the Police and Crime Commissioner's investment into community safety through small local grants and SPACE programme has helped see reductions in seasonal youth anti-social behaviour and even reductions in levels of youth offending.

Burton Albion Community Trust report a growing desire from young people not just to attend activities, but for intentional development programmes which give them opportunities to learn new skills and gain qualifications.

The Scouts held an open day in local primary schools for the new Muslim section of the 9th Burton Scout Troop. This has successfully attracted 18 members and 4 volunteers, and continues to thrive with young people from one of the most deprived wards in the county benefiting from the new #SkillsForLife programme.



Strengths of the Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector is not the same as other sectors. It has distinctive features that are worth highlighting, celebrating and building upon as strengths. It is also important that the sector is allowed to be what it is, and that the temptation to overly manage or change it is resisted at all costs. The voluntary sector's strengths can be characterised as follows:

- Flexibility
- Growing reputation for delivering outcomes
- Value for money with very efficient delivery
- Innovation
- Resilience, often from being in it for the long haul to support communities
- Diversity of groups and programmes
- Person-centred approach
- Needs-led approach
- Local knowledge and connected relationships and collaborations
- Deep roots in their communities which brings a non-stigmatising approach and higher levels of trust

What are the Biggest Challenges for Local Voluntary Sector Organisations?



By listening to feedback from local organisations, SCVYS has identified four broad areas which are currently presenting the most significant challenges.

1. Public Sector Contracts/Commissions

As well as the much publicised and already mentioned reduced level of available funding from public sector contracts, other challenges have increased. These include but are not limited to:

- The use of Payment by Results – this way of working creates enormous additional pressures on voluntary organisations and often penalises them for working in a person-centred way.
- Contracts seem to be more specialised, restricted, targeted and focused.
- Application timescales are often reduced and processes are harder to complete.
- Length of contracts seem to be getting shorter.
- Too close an alignment with governmental structures, and a sense that “they” want us to become like them
- No real sign of a change culture within public services. For example, no release of power or control, a strong adversity to risk, micro-management, etc. This can be particularly evident in departments such as legal, property and procurement.
- The talk around partnerships is great, but there is a massive lack of value/equity in reality, especially when the difficult decisions have to be made.
- Delivering a contract which evolves over time can cause an organisation to suffer from mission drift.
- The need to evidence impact and outcomes, and have clear and consistent processes to be able to monitor, evaluate and report back.
- With funding, there is often no allocation for core functions of organisations, leaving little or no time and resource for managers to plan, reflect and develop their organisational capacity in a considered way.
- Winning a large contract can bring about a significant capacity increase in a short space of time resulting in massive pressure on staff and volunteers such as the trustee board to oversee and manage effectively.

Feedback from one of our member groups around the last challenge in this list was communicated to us in the following way:

Good managers are hard to come by and even more difficult to retain. In our opinion this has a lot to do with the way voluntary sector organisations are commissioned. Having restrictions such as payment by results, being overly prescriptive in contract specifications about the way services are commissioned and how they should be operationally delivered, leaves nothing for good managers to manage. They are left simply managing the logistics of a contract trying to maximise the income, leaving very little time for service and staff development, supervision, continued professional development and sourcing alternative income streams to enhance sustainability of service provision.

2. Increased Demand

This term is mostly linked to reduction in resources. In seeking to address this, services in Staffordshire have coined the phrase “Communities First, Services Last!” This philosophy is at the forefront of the People Helping People work stream, one of four enablers identified by the County Council alongside Digital, Workforce and Cross Sector Networks. These enablers underpin the change of approach in terms of engagement with the Staffordshire public described as **#DoingOurBit** where every individual is encouraged to consider one additional thing they can do to support their own health and wellbeing, help those around them (family, neighbours, friends, etc.) and protect the local environment.

How welcome these developments are is dependent on where you are viewing them from. Communities doing more for themselves is in one sense the public service leadership’s dream, but for staff or volunteers in community organisations they can feel they are now bearing the responsibility of carrying and delivering what was previously a well-resourced service.

At the same time public service employees can easily feel insecure as they see a secure career disappearing out of the window as more and more of their role is performed elsewhere and without the same level of cost.

“ 60% of charities saw an increase in demand for their services (The FSI, Trends Report 2019) ”

3. Resources

Resource has always been one of the biggest challenges of working in the voluntary sector. By resource, This does not just mean money or a lack of it, although this is certainly at the top of the list of concerns for most senior leaders and managers at the current time.

Attracting the right volunteers is another key resource pressure. Trends in volunteering would suggest there are some challenges ahead in demographics despite the national work led by Step Up To Serve with their #iWill campaign around youth social action and indeed the emphasis given to this through the National Citizen Service programme. Progress towards their 50% goal by 2020 is impressive, but young people definitely volunteer in a different way to the older generation, and organisations need to adapt to this or they will continue to restrict access to this invaluable resource.



Time is also a critical factor in diversifying income streams and being able to explore areas such as philanthropy, private sector sponsorship and developing commercial models of delivery.

We need to engage with wider network of young people and also recruit suitable adult volunteers to become sustainable. Funding would help, but people are a greater priority.

Clare Social Leadership have done some pilot work in Hull and suggest there is a lack of investment in social leadership. When resource is limited the training and workforce development budget can be one of the first things to go, as organisations go into survival mode. As time becomes more precious, planning, evaluation and reflection can seem like unaffordable luxuries, when in fact without them people and organisations can quickly lose their creativity, passion and continuous improvement.



4. Uncertainty

Although this has always been something the sector has had to live with, and indeed responds to brilliantly with innovation and resilience, the current landscape seems to be creating additional levels of uncertainty that the sector is needing to respond to.

The paralysis in strategic decision making since the Brexit referendum in 2016 has placed additional pressure on the system of support for children and young people. Another delay in the necessary Comprehensive Spending Review due this autumn, but pushed back twelve months and replaced with another 12-month local government settlement is the latest example of this. Another change to the

Youth Minister, at a time when momentum appeared to be growing for increased investment, could illustrate whilst the Government is talking about the need for more youth services, the resource to back up the rhetoric may still be some time off.

This all leads to more short termism at a local level. Funding is allocated sporadically against the latest priority issue rather than in a joined-up way to address multiple vulnerabilities and indeed root cause. Prevention and early intervention are delivered with the crumbs of resource left over once the statutory duties of health and social care have been fulfilled.

Burton YMCA had to withdraw accommodation support services for 16-17 year olds in 2016 due to cuts to the Supporting People Grant, leaving a huge hole in local support services. In reality this means that the organisation needs to generate £300,000 per year through fundraising, private business sponsorship support and charitable grants. The time invested to make this happen is not insignificant.

Short termism also increases competition and therefore organisational risk. The Youth Endowment Fund being a classic recent example where almost 450 applications were received in one competitive round of funding. All of this at a time when greater collaboration is not only being asked for, but is also what is needed to knit together the local support system for children, young people and their families.

All of this can be overcome with investment in the development of a long-term cross-Governmental plan that all relevant partners and stakeholders buy in to for the long haul.

We are confident that there is need for the activities and services we provide, but how those services and activities are funded can be challenging.

A review of the statutory duty around sufficiency of youth services has been started, along with a commitment to developing a Youth Charter designed to outline the Government's policy and priorities in regard to young people for the next ten years both led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Discussions are taking place about youth networks, such as SCVYS and our membership, local youth partnerships, presumably some form of successor to the former Children's Trusts and even local voluntary sector infrastructure.

After a season of being out in the cold, youth services are now firmly back on the radar for national policy makers. A causal link between a growth in knife crime and serious youth violence and diminishing youth services has quickly changed perceptions for the better in relation to the value and benefits of good quality youth work.



Such a swift turn around in fortunes provides a degree of hope, but needs to be quickly backed up with additional resource to alleviate the current pressures and begin to invest in better outcomes for children and young people.



There is so much need for early invention provision such as we provide. I have schools biting my hand off for interventions but funding is becoming more and more competitive and we are struggling more than last year to secure funding to deliver these sessions

Conclusions and Recommendations



At a very basic level what young people actually want and need does not significantly change. Whether it is **“Somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to”** from the Youth Matters report of 2010, or the 5 Every Child Matters Outcomes covering **“Being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and to have economic wellbeing.”**

One might add in a sense of belonging and to be inherently valued which whilst implicit maybe in the outcomes mentioned are also important to highlight specifically.

In order to create an environment which supports these outcomes for young people and enables them to thrive, the support system needs appropriate levels of resource.

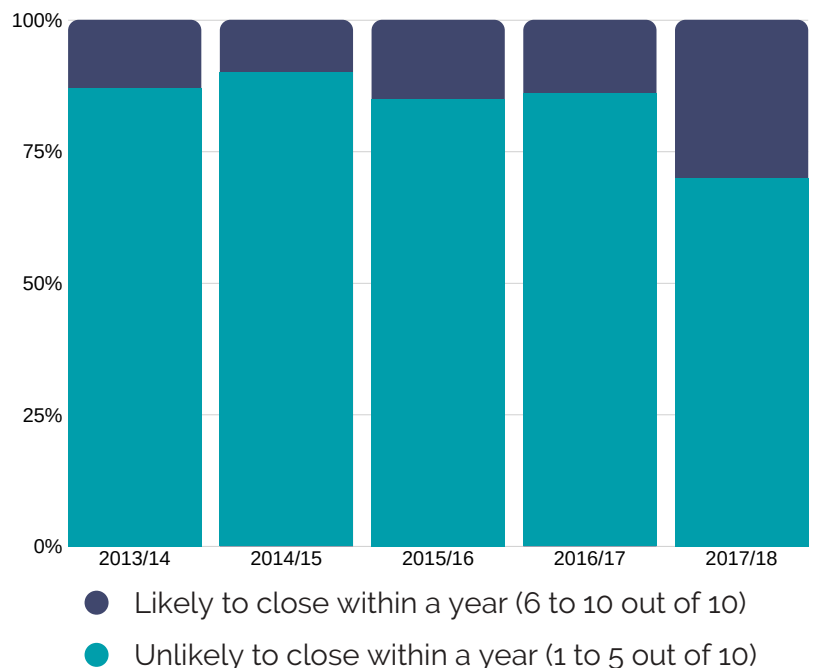
One of the first sentences in this report read as follows:

“The support system for children and young people is cracking, and so are the people who make it work. Unless national policy direction significantly changes soon it is merely a question of which cracks first.”

I am fairly nervous as funding is getting more difficult. We do not charge many participants as they come from tough backgrounds for fear they may not attend/participate. I had to use my own money to keep the club afloat.

In previous years, just over 1 in 10 charities said it was likely they could face closure in the next 12 months. In 2017/18 this rose to 3 in 10.

Longer term confidence in the sector is reasonably stable with **76%** of SCVYS member organisations being confident in the future sustainability of their organisation. The FSI has just reported a more worrying picture.



What is needed is ring-fenced funding for youth services allocated to each local authority area, along with devolved power and responsibility to local partnerships who can ensure that resource is utilised to the maximum benefit of local children, young people and families, meeting their needs and giving them the best opportunity to thrive. In our view this should provide enough resources to ensure that in every place there is:

- Sufficiency across universal provision of youth services, positive activities, etc.
- The creation of a Local Integrated Youth Offer
- Pathways for workforce development including leadership skills
- Support for Youth Voice including co-design and co-production through deliberative processes
- Investment in Earliest Help and particularly linking the local voluntary sector support into schools to provide bespoke support to individuals at the earliest opportunity.
- Integrated approaches to targeted youth work and higher tier support focusing on vulnerability as a whole rather than siloed responses around single emerging issues.
- Opportunities for young people to participate in Social Action and Community Engagement
- Positive communications campaigns highlighting the contribution of local young people to give them value, a sense of belonging and opportunities to give something back.
- Investment in voluntary youth sector infrastructure and networks to support market development, build capacity, organisational resilience, safety and sustainability.
- Oversight by a Strategic Youth Partnership (either stand-alone or within the context of a Families Strategic Partnership)

We are extremely confident; our organisation is thriving and we are very excited about our future, with the continued support from SCVYS.

A regular, committed group of volunteers enable the youth club to continue. They are passionate about helping the young people to grow into responsible and caring adults.

SCVYS is hopeful that we will be here and able to communicate an updated state of the voluntary youth sector in Staffordshire sometime within the next 5 years.



SCVYS values, supports and champions the voluntary sector as it strengthens local communities



State of the Voluntary Youth and Children's Sector 2019

SCVYS
42a Eastgate Street
Stafford
ST16 2L7

01785 240378

office@staffscvys.org.uk

