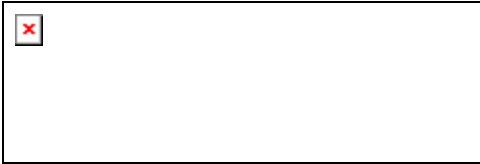




Comprehensive Spending Review Strategy for Youth Services - Response by Changemakers

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	Which area of the review are you responding to? (please mark X)
Prevention strand	
Review of disabled children	
Strategy for youth services	X
Review of high cost, high harm families	



Comprehensive Spending Review Strategy for Youth Services - Response by Changemakers

Five Main Recommendations from Changemakers

We have answered all the questions posed in the consultation document below. However, to preface our response, we would like to highlight five main recommendations which apply across the board:

- The youth led approach (giving young people the opportunity to design, develop and deliver services with appropriate support from adults in the role of facilitator) should be at the heart of the strategy for youth services.
- Collaboration between statutory and voluntary sectors is the most effective way to deliver youth services and should be more actively supported and encouraged.
- Longer term strategic planning and sustainable funding commitments will create more effective youth services.
- Further investment in the youth service workforce is required to ensure that the quality of provision is as high as possible.
- More work needs to be done at local level to ensure that the voluntary sector can play a full and active role in the delivery of statutory youth services.

Key Questions

What is the current distribution of youth services and youth engagement activities available across the country? How is that likely to evolve following the Youth Green Paper?

Our experience of working with Youth Services indicates that the challenges presented by the Green Paper are being overcome most effectively where there has been **a consistent or long term commitment to involving young people in the delivery of services**.

Within the voluntary sector, a great deal of engagement and innovation takes place, and there seems an increasing recognition that greater collaboration between the statutory and voluntary sectors will provide increased engagement opportunities. However, this joint working is patchy at present. Our experience is that **services are best where collaboration between voluntary and statutory sectors is strong**.

Statutory youth provision has suffered from issues of resourcing, which has impacted upon the ability to provide sustained youth engagement. Where local authorities have been able to make **a sustained commitment to services**, provision has had greater impact.

Building on the Youth Green Paper, is there more that could be done to improve and sustain the effectiveness in the delivery of existing services and activities?

All our experience suggests that **a youth led approach across all provision produces the most effective delivery of services and activities**.

Partnerships between statutory and voluntary youth providers have a crucial role to play in engagement across all services for young people, from education, through to health, to the care system. Statutory providers should be encouraged even more strongly to expand their partnerships with the voluntary sector.

Recent years have seen a recognition and commitment from government to improving and sustaining youth work. However, if there is an agreed acceptance of the need for statutory and voluntary youth services which engage and work with young people then there is also a corresponding need to **invest in developing the capacity and resourcing of the workforce**.

What are the particular barriers faced by different groups of young people, including disabled young people, in accessing services, and what are the policy issues that arise?

One of the most significant barriers is **young people's ability to access the services they need when and where they need them**. The solution is a broad number of access points that are geared up to addressing the needs of every young person. In this context, it is very important that young people themselves have a major role in designing and delivering services, and we therefore warmly welcome the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Fund initiatives

Young people's expectations and perceptions of services often rest upon their **direct relationships and experiences with individual workers and agencies**. If these relationships are not up to standard, this can become a major barrier, so it is crucial to get this element right. Investment in developing the skills of staff working with young people is therefore a must.

What is the national and international evidence on the effectiveness of different types of services and activities in terms of better life outcomes?

Changemakers has over 12 years of experience of running programmes for young people across the UK. At the heart of our work has been a commitment to the youth led approach, and we believe that this way of working has created better life outcomes for the tens of thousands of young people with whom we have worked over the years.

Our work, which includes the Y ACT Young Advocates, Y SPEAK, Millennium Volunteers, Active Citizenship and Social Enterprise programmes, shows that an approach that incorporates young people planning and shaping their own activity or service impacts positively on their individual experience and subsequent life outcomes. We have been able to see young people's relationships with their peers, their communities, their parents and professionals improve through this approach. As a result young people have engaged in accredited learning where they may not have done so previously and become more engaged as citizens within communities. These and other outcomes demonstrate that **the youth led approach increases the prospect of better life outcomes**.

Changemakers has also worked closely with agencies in Australia and there is considerable evidence from our work there to show that approaches involving coherent partnerships between young people, their parents, their communities and professionals have considerable impact on their engagement and personal development.

How can we best combine demand led provision for young people with provision that is planned and structured to have the best impact on outcomes for children and young people?

Our experience in developing programmes has shown that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive!

One important factor is to **support the young person 'demand led' approach with appropriately trained adults in the role of facilitator** or critical friend. These facilitators might be youth workers, teachers, parents or 'older' young people. Facilitation is crucial and often provision is either too directive, with young people having no say, or too demand led, in which case impact and outcomes may be less effective.

It is important that **engagement opportunities and access points should be flexible and sustained**. From this, an approach that allows young people to choose the things they wish to develop and pursue, within a well thought out approach that does not remove them from a role in the planning and shaping of the activities, works effectively on a number of levels:

- Being a positive experience for the young person
- Increasing the learning and development for the young person
- Developing a more flexible and responsive service
- Freeing up and liberating professionals to focus more upon the development of the young person

What more can we do to support and enable young people to exert a strong demand side influence on provision? What would we expect in return from young people – their rights and responsibilities?

We believe that, **within the right systems and structures, and with the right sort of facilitation and support, young people can and will exert a strong influence on provision.**

We have developed a number of innovative programmes which place young people in prominent service design and delivery roles. These include:

- **Y ACT**, in which young people are trained and supported to be 'Young Advocates', housed within and working for voluntary and statutory service providers and ensuring that provision meets the needs of young people. Current partners include Government Office North East and North West, who are using Changemakers Young Advocates to shape their services for young people.
- **Y SPEAK**, through which the DfES outsourced delivery of the Children and Young People's Consultation Fund to Changemakers. Over an 18 month period over 20,000 young people received funding for youth led consultation projects with statutory agencies. 50 young people were trained as Youth Board Members and made all decisions on the allocation of the £1m grant pot.
- **Y FUND**, through which we are supporting local authorities to deliver the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund, ensuring that the youth led approach underpinning these initiatives is fully delivered.

These initiatives provide a model for the involvement of young people in service delivery in the future. They also offer **a vision for user involvement in the delivery of public services as a whole**. Our work in this area was commended by the Prime Minister in a speech to the CBI on the reform of public services in June 2006.

In order to encourage this demand side influence, we need to develop the capacity of professionals and agencies to work within a youth led framework. However, **appropriate support and encouragement does not mean an approach which assumes that 'the young person is always right'**. Although young people have a role to play in shaping and delivering services, they also need to develop an understanding that decisions need to be made in collaboration with the communities in which they live. We have found that this emerging consciousness of their fellow citizens, each with their own views and needs, provides some of the richest learning for young people. This further strengthens the case for involving young people in shaping and delivering services.

What principles and priorities should guide the allocation of current and future resources? And who do we need to target?

Funding for services should be prioritised by principles that include some of the following criteria:

- Active involvement by young people in shaping and delivering services in a 'real' and meaningful way
- Practice that is committed to and promotes a young person led ethos
- Delivery that involves partnership working between statutory and voluntary sectors
- Agencies that can provide targeted services
- Developing and supporting sustained activity which allows consistent work with young people, in particular those disadvantaged and hard to reach
- A sustained commitment to workforce development
- Resourcing agencies that support and develop capacity for professionals working with young people
- A commitment to resource innovation and to promote and develop creative approaches to new youth work e.g. technology and new media

What measures and milestones need to be in place to ensure that performance can be assessed and delivery monitored at a local level?

Work is in progress with both the statutory and voluntary sectors to agree processes to develop commonly accepted standards for measuring value for money and performance.

Additional work in this area is vital, especially to **ensure that performance assessment mechanisms and tools reflect the approach and activities of the voluntary youth sector.**

Measures and milestones need to **strike a realistic balance between outputs and outcomes and recognise the additional challenges and costs of working in a youth led way, and with young people who are hard to reach.**

Supplementary questions

What are the barriers and enablers of effective Third Sector provision, including statutory commissioning capability?

Barriers:

- Short term contracts
- Funding going to larger agencies within the sector that have a greater infrastructure capacity
- Target driven and value for money ethos stifling and inhibiting innovation
- Lack of investment in the core funding of smaller agencies

Enablers:

- Sustained longer term funding
- Infrastructure and capacity building investment
- Proactive support from government bodies to support the voluntary sector and to highlight and promote strong and innovative practice to the statutory sector

In addition we would like to raise two major issues which have had a negative impact on Changemakers and which we think the government needs to consider carefully as the third sector continues to develop a greater role in public service delivery.

Firstly, there needs to be **a more realistic approach to contracting voluntary sector agencies to deliver youth services.** We have been placed in a number of very difficult situations by the rapidly changing priorities of statutory agencies and the impact this has had on contracts we have been delivering. One example of this is the DfES Y SPEAK contract, in which we took on a £1.5m contract at 6 weeks notice, requiring us to scale up the whole infrastructure of our organisation. Despite huge success, the contract was brought to an end 18 months later with only 6 weeks' notice. This left us with an enormous liability and insufficient time to ungear, resulting in us having to dip into our reserves to the tune of around £100k. Despite the existence of the compact we know that many other agencies have found themselves in similar situations. A greater appreciation of the challenges of running a small voluntary organisation, along with more realistic timescales and longer term contracts (subject to satisfactory performance, of course), would enable the voluntary sector to play a positive and active role in the delivery of statutory youth services.

A second issue is **the capability of statutory agencies to commission services effectively.** As the role of statutory agencies changes from delivery to commissioning, we often find that staff involved in procurement lack the relevant skills and expertise. This is hardly surprising, given that many of them came into the statutory youth sector to deliver services themselves, rather than employ others to do so. Commissioning requires a very different skillset to delivery, and our experience suggests that the statutory workforce has not been adequately, developed and trained to fulfil this new function. We would strongly recommend further support for statutory staff to enable them to effectively commission services.

What can be done to improve the ability of universal provision to identify and provide a service to those with greater needs?

We would suggest four measures:

- Give young people a greater role in planning and delivering services to ensure resources are targeted most effectively
- Increase investment in professional development
- Place more resources into the hands of agencies with the expertise to reach those with greater needs
- Increase innovation and creative approaches to engaging and sustaining work with young people

Which projects and programmes in the last five years have had a proven and sustained impact and brought innovation to delivery of services for young people?

Apart from our own programmes (!), we would particularly like to highlight:

- **Millennium Volunteers**
- The **Foyer Federation** development of Foyers for young people who are homeless
- The **Keyfund**
- **YouthNet** for its work on developing innovative advice, guidance and support tools to advise and guide young people utilising new media which is the most attractive medium for young people

What encourages young people to try new and different kinds of activities from those they already do?

The answer to this question reflects the more general influences on young people in our society.

The most important influence on young people is their peers. This is why further development of the youth led approach is critical in engaging young people in new and different types of activities.

Parents are also hugely influential. For this reason we welcome the government's recent commitment to do more to support parents and develop parenting skills. This is an area in which Changemakers intends to start to work.

However, encouraging young people to take part in activity once and to give a sustained commitment are different things. In order for young people to retain participation and engagement they need to be supported to play an active role in decision making and leading their own activities.

What evidence is there of the benefits that arise from young people's involvement in design and provision of their activities? What evidence is there of how outcomes have improved as a result?

Our experience shows that where young people have been involved in the design and provision of their activities this has impacted successfully upon the delivery of services and the learning of the young people involved.

This is evidenced by the evidence of evaluation and the feedback of participants and beneficiaries of the programmes we have described above – Y ACT, Y SPEAK and Y FUND.

What attracts people to the youth work workforce? What is less attractive about membership of this workforce?

Many people are attracted to the youth work workforce by **the opportunity to engage positively with young people** and by seeing the potential for young people to do constructive things and to be influential within their communities.

Others recognise that, for many young people, **formal education can be a dispiriting and disempowering experience** and does not provide everyone with a framework to develop, learn, engage in the world around them and realise their potential.

The more collaborative, facilitative, non-hierarchical style of youth work compared to other professions that support young people is also attractive to many who work in the sector.

What is less attractive is the **lack of investment in the workforce, a lack of professional development opportunities** and a general perception that **the workforce is undervalued compared to other professions**, for example teaching.