

Comprehensive Spending Review 2007

Children and Young People Review

A submission by Groundwork UK on behalf of the Federation of Groundwork Trusts



1. Introduction and overview

This is a time of tremendous activity and change in work with young people. The Children's Bill, establishment of Children's Trusts, implementation of the Tomlinson Review and Russell Commission, new resources for play from the Big Lottery Fund and the appointment of a Children's Commissioner are all indicators of the importance and political commitment attached to improving services for young people.

Youth Matters aims to 'make sure that all young people are given the best chance in life to succeed - by improving their qualifications, getting better jobs and making positive contributions to their communities'. It proposes that provision for young people is extended and services for young people be underpinned by greater participation of young people in delivery and development. These changes indicate the importance of innovation and creativity in addressing the needs of young people and Groundwork welcomes these developments.

When we ask young people to tell us about their role in their community and in society, their concerns revolve around a lack of options, a lack of choices, a lack of motivation and a lack of status. Too much local planning and decision-making and too many political initiatives and action revolve around doing things to young people rather than giving young people the freedom, responsibility and the tools to do things for themselves. Being able to participate in shaping their own surroundings and their own futures is crucial if today's young people are going to grow into tomorrow's responsible decision-makers.

According to Professor Hugh Matthews, Director of the Centre for Children and Youth, "Poor participation mechanisms are very effective in encouraging young people to be non-participants now and in later life. If children know that no-one is listening and that their views do not count, their interest is thwarted and they enter adulthood with low expectations of getting involved."¹

Engaging young people in projects that improve their surroundings can generate a renewed sense of community spirit, provide learning and employment opportunities and contribute to the creation of more cohesive and safer neighbourhoods. Working with young people on regeneration projects in

¹ Children and Community Regeneration, Hugh Matthews, Save the Children and Groundwork, 2001.

their neighbourhoods can be empowering and deliver real benefits for young people themselves and for disadvantaged communities in general.

Groundwork is a key deliverer of work with young people. Our experience tells us that;

Young people want to see change. Children and young people are the ones that have most to lose from neighbourhood decline and most to gain from the provision of new facilities and services.

Young people can participate in and implement change. Community-based projects enable young people to plan and undertake changes to their surroundings through a process of negotiation and consultation with other members of their community.

Young people can change themselves and encourage others to change too. Involvement in community-based projects can be the catalyst that kickstarts a change in attitude and behaviour among young people and a change in perception of young people's potential among adults.

2. Groundwork and young people

Groundwork is a federation of Trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, each working with their partners to improve the quality of the local environment, the lives of local people and the success of local businesses in areas in need of investment and support.

Each Groundwork Trust is a partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors with its own board of trustees. The work of the Trusts is supported by the national and regional offices of Groundwork UK and by Groundwork Wales.

We work closely with the Government and national and regional assemblies, local authorities, public bodies and businesses. We also receive support from the European Union, the National Lottery, private sponsors and charitable foundations.

In England we receive a grant from DCLG to support our activities and we are a partner in delivering the Government's Sustainable Communities plan and its campaign to create cleaner, safer, greener communities.

The first Groundwork Trust was established on Merseyside in 1981 and this year we are celebrating 25 years of practical action.

Groundwork's vision is of a society made up of sustainable communities which are vibrant, healthy and safe, which respect the local and global environment and where individuals and enterprise prosper.

Groundwork's purpose is to build sustainable communities in areas of need through joint environmental action.

We aim to do this by developing and delivering partnership projects that:

- enable an integrated and community-led approach to local regeneration
- use environmental improvement as a means of achieving social and economic change
- help individuals and organisations contribute to sustainable development.

These projects aim to bring benefits equally for:

- **people** – creating opportunities for people to learn new skills and become more active citizens
- **places** – delivering environmental improvements that create cleaner, safer and greener neighbourhoods
- **prosperity** – helping businesses and individuals fulfil their potential.

Groundwork's projects and programmes are delivered by professional staff with expertise in six areas:

- **Communities** – building stronger neighbourhoods
- **Land** – reconnecting people with their surroundings
- **Employment** – training for work and stimulating enterprise
- **Education** – learning, citizenship and sustainability
- **Business** – integrating the economy and the environment
- **Youth** – realising young people's potential

Groundwork manages a range of local, regional, national and international projects and programmes aimed specifically at providing opportunities for children and young people to get more involved in improving the quality of life in their communities. These projects and programmes are supported by a variety of organisations including DfES, Big Lottery Fund, private companies and charitable trusts and delivered in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, the police, primary care trusts and other voluntary sector providers.

We help young people participate in activities designed to bring them into contact with adults in their community and to increase their own confidence and self-esteem. Our aim is to get young people interested in the place where they live and to help them play a full and active part in society. We do this by encouraging them to take part in practical activities such as making videos about life in their neighbourhood or planning and designing their own play areas or youth shelters. Some of these activities are specifically targeted in places where there are high levels of crime as a way of harnessing young people's energy and reducing anti-social behaviour.

The comments in this submission have been kept brief and relate mainly to the sub-review on the strategy for youth services. In particular they focus on barriers and opportunities with regard to involving young people in the design of neighbourhood services – specifically those connected with the

Government's stated aims of making sure children and young people have 'something to do, somewhere to go and someone to talk to'.

3. Putting young people at the heart of communities

a) Improving participation

Empowering young people to shape local services can only be achieved through a commitment to a culture of participation and the adoption of mechanisms through which young people feel able to participate fully in service development and delivery. Some Connexions services have achieved excellent participation mechanisms and there are lots of opportunities to share good practice.

The participation of young people in the management of services that directly affect them is vital in ensuring improved outcomes. If this participation process is embedded then it will contribute to delivering services that are needed and used, and thereby ensure that improved outcomes are delivered.

Surveys and activities undertaken by Groundwork and others² illustrate clearly that young people want to see their suggestions acted upon; they have a lot to contribute in terms of developing creative and practical solutions and the energy to see them through. 'Quick hits' are needed which are achievable within teenage timeframes, but it is important not to consign young people wholly to youth-specific agendas, as they also have much to contribute on wider issues.

Groundwork's experience is that, given the opportunity, young people do take their responsibilities seriously. Nevertheless, young people need support to enable them to contribute fully: too much responsibility too soon is setting young people up to fail. If young people are drawn in too early, or at an unnecessarily superficial level, however, then there is a risk that they will be further marginalised and disillusioned.

To ensure that young people facing particular barriers, eg those who are disabled, are effectively engaged by service providers it is essential that providers and government adhere to the 'United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child', which the UK is signed up to; in short, ensuring that 'equity' is achieved.

The development of Children and Young People's plans will help to create a clear picture of the range of needs of young people. For many service providers, however, significant awareness-raising training may be required. Groundwork's experience of the National Lottery funded Better Play programme and its commitment to funding inclusive play, is that play projects catering for young people with disabilities were strengthened through an

² Attention is drawn in particular to the survey of young people carried out by Groundwork on behalf of the Government's Urban Green Spaces Taskforce and published in the report of Working Group 3 (People and Places). Green Spaces, Better Places, DTLR, 2002.

extensive awareness-raising and training programme. This resulted in stronger applications to the fund and greater delivery of projects for disabled young people.

Groundwork supports the conclusions set out by youth worker Bernard Davies in his essay in 'Play, Potential and Participation' published by Groundwork in 2005. These include a number of key conditions required to ensure effective participation as follows:

- **Selecting the right agenda** – integrating decision-making activity into young people's everyday activities including youth-specific agendas eg leisure but also issues of more general concern such as housing and community cohesion.
- **Defining and enabling** – setting clear and realistic purposes and boundaries for involvement and ensuring extra time is available to build the skills and confidence that will be required for effective participation.
- **Providing dedicated resources** – specifically staff with appropriate youth work experience and skills to support young people through the participation process, coupled with 'champions' to ensure that all of an organisation's major decisions are 'youth-proofed'.

"Whatever structures and mechanisms are put in place, however, a process will be needed which, over time, can convince adults to relinquish some of their power to new and often relatively untried young partners. Often the messages emerging from this will be discomfiting and contentious. Adults therefore – local community activists, professional practitioners, agency managers, politicians, other policy makers – will need to accept that, for them too, this is going to be a learning experience requiring a practice shaped by high levels of undefensiveness and self-reflection. Indeed, ultimately the decisive question may turn out to be not: 'Can the young participate?', but 'Are the adults – we - up to the challenge?'"

Bernard Davies

'Play, Participation, Potential – putting young people at the heart of communities', Groundwork, 2005

b) Delivering improved outcomes

Ensuring appropriate and sustainable outcomes for children and young people depends on ensuring the provision of comprehensive services which reflect a diversity of needs.

One of the main challenges faced by those working with and for young people is that the different agendas which impact on young people (eg Respect, 'cleaner, safer, greener communities' and Education for Sustainable Development) are not always seen as absolutely complementary.

Although at a policy level care is clearly taken to ensure a joined-up approach, the presentation of policy can often lead to mixed messages about the role of young people in their communities. This confused public and media debate can in itself present a barrier to young people becoming involved in positive local activity.

Most would agree that we need to be wary of over-using enforcement to tackle problems such as anti-social behaviour and instead start to understand what building pro-social behaviour means.

While it is true that disorder, vandalism and anti-social behaviour often come out at the top of the list when people are asked what they would like to see changed in their neighbourhood, at the same time people are instinctively nervous of an over-emphasis on enforcement. Curfews and ASBOs may alleviate an immediate problem and other residents are glad when the worst offenders are removed, but most can instinctively see that these measures don't address root causes.

Groundwork believes that enabling young people to participate in making their neighbourhoods cleaner, safer and greener can help foster this pro-social behaviour. Of course this presents a problem for policymakers in that success can only be measured in a negative ie if the park isn't vandalised or if graffiti doesn't appear. Plus, no matter how much social capital and respect is built in a neighbourhood, the actions of a single determined individual can make it appear that nobody cares. There is clearly a need to understand better and focus more on the positive attitudes and behaviour of the majority.

There are many areas where this focus on building pro-social behaviour among young people can deliver beneficial outcomes and Groundwork is engaged in a range of projects and programmes that provide a continuum of support for young people throughout their development and transition to adulthood.

Helping children and young people lead the process of improving their school grounds and systems as part of healthy schools and sustainable schools initiatives can be an important first step in instilling positive behaviours as well as delivering improved educational outcomes and these initiatives should be supported as a priority.

In the North East Groundwork is also developing innovative pre-school programmes connecting with local Sure Start initiatives that help parents and their young children explore plants and the local environment together.

For those young people not benefiting fully from formal education or training the chance to deliver practical neighbourhood projects can offer a way of demonstrating achievement and building pride and confidence. Groundwork's Motiv8 projects use this approach to re-engage young people in the education process.

Decision-making about the local environment can also be a powerful tool for delivering improvements in community safety and addressing anti-social behaviour.

Youth Works is a partnership bringing together Groundwork, Crime Concern and Marks & Spencer. Individual programmes are managed by local Groundwork Trusts and, after receiving initial central support for set-up costs, are expected to obtain local funding to sustain their work.

Over 80% of the young people interviewed said that Youth Works had helped them in some way. Examples quoted were: been given fun things to do; learned new skills; helped to get on with people; kept out of trouble and kept off the street.

A sample of young people from each area was also interviewed using the Rickter Scale (a process which allows exploration of key areas of their lives). The interviews revealed that their neighbourhood, alcohol, and school were areas of concern. At the time of the first interview, the young people felt powerless to change any of these factors.

Although results were mixed, at the time of the second interview 37% had improved their overall score by three points or more. Those that gave more positive scores were not getting into so much trouble with the Police and had a better experience of school or work. They also had become more involved in their neighbourhood and, where this happened, it was directly related to Youth Works.

Although it is difficult to point to outcomes that can be traced to a single intervention, individual case studies clearly demonstrate the distance that can be travelled by young people as a result of the support they receive.

- A 14 year old young man from Bridgend was 'public enemy number one' and was responsible for a large number of anti-social incidents and through being caught up in the Jackass craze indulged in behaviour that was a danger to himself and others. He suffers from ADHD but has calmed down considerably and took the lead role in managing the finance and directing a video project. He became the hero of Bonfire Night when he stopped the Fire Brigade putting out their bonfire by assuring the firemen that the young people were being supervised by qualified youth workers.
- A 15 year old young man from Jarrow was a truant from school and a rebel. He was well known on the estate for spraying paint, drinking, and verbal abuse. Youth Works filled the gap from him having nothing to do, to working in a team and improving his communication skills. Fairbridge also worked with him and he went back to school and passed his entrance exams for the Army. He became active in designing and decorating the Youth Room at the Community Centre, making use of his considerable creative talents. His leadership skills are apparent, and he is helpful, carrying bags and being useful at the

Community Centre. The Community Wardens have said they have noticed a difference in his attitude.

- A 12 year old boy from West Cumbria was very disruptive and had to be banned from Youth Works. He was allowed back and to the workers' surprise sat through a healthy eating session, quiet and enthralled. His mother supports Youth Works' approach to disciplining her son. He had been back in Youth Works for a month without any trouble, which is a significant improvement on his past behaviour.

“To enable more young people to reach their potential and become autonomous citizens, increased investment in their human capital is necessary. A key focus of government policy and resources should therefore be on giving young people the opportunity to acquire life skills, which will include educational, vocational, social, practical and physical skills. ...

“It is clear that there is a need for continued interventions to tackle social deprivation and social exclusion in general, including poverty, unemployment, crime, drug misuse, housing and health. There is also a need for a combination of universal and targeted approaches to enable young people in particular to reach their potential. This should include policies to promote young people's involvement in their communities and to improve the local physical environment to enable young people to feel part of, and proud of their area and enable participation in activities. Other strategies are also needed to target services for those young people who face particular disadvantage based around the needs of the individual young person, whilst also acknowledging the wider context within which they live.”

Kate Stanley and Corinna Gamble

‘Play, Participation, Potential – putting young people at the heart of communities’, Groundwork, 2005

4. The role of the VCS

It is still not widely understood just how much the quality of the participation process counts in terms of involving children and young people in service design and delivery and achieving improved outcomes for them and their communities. Poor participation techniques are the best way of ensuring young people stay disengaged and half-hearted attempts can do more damage than good.

However, there is a whole sector willing to engage and help with this process. Local government in particular but also other bodies such as housing associations and developers should use trusted and skilled intermediaries with a track record in brokering the needs of young people with those with the power to make investment decisions. This can be done through the LAA and children's trust models but not always as a service contract. There are many in the voluntary sector that would be well placed to advise strategically on

LAA negotiations with a brief to think about how things will get done as well as who will do them and what the outputs will be.

This intermediary role will become even more important with 'double devolution', neighbourhood governance and the VCS delivering more public services, especially in deprived communities where small local groups need help to build their capacity and discharge the responsibilities being offered to them. This role often means attending meetings and sitting on boards eg LSP sub-groups and is time- and resource-intensive. It should be recognised and resourced. There is a clear link to be made here with the parallel CSR review of the role of the third sector in delivering social and economic regeneration.

5. Case study examples

- **Something to do**

Groundwork has long experience of providing a wide range of activities for young people – from summer holiday schemes to practical environmental projects to sporting activities. At Groundwork Rossendale, the Youth Works team offers a range of ongoing activities including a football group, skate group and a dance group. Last year a small group of young people in Stacksteads took part in a project to produce a film - the "Stacky Rap Track" - which was shown at the Co-op young filmmakers' festival at the Bradford Film and Photography Museum.

Meanwhile, a summer holiday scheme included a project to clear a derelict and overgrown local garden to make it into a useable space. In the process the young people built a barbecue and hosted an *al fresco* meal for their friends as a celebration of their achievements. This also created an ideal opportunity for the community dietician to come along and provide informal advice on healthy eating.

- **Somewhere to go**

Groundwork has recently been awarded funding from the Big Lottery Fund to create 'young people friendly neighbourhoods' across England. A partnership between Groundwork, CABE Space Education and UK Youth, the programme will involve 1,200 people from 18 neighbourhoods in undertaking 'community audits'. With other local stakeholders, the young people will be encouraged to propose developments or changes that will improve the local neighbourhood for the whole community.

The programme has been informed by development work undertaken by Groundwork Wakefield which identified the opportunity for young people to take the lead in informing decisions about local service delivery. Groundwork Wakefield will be running the programme in three separate areas of Wakefield in conjunction with the local authority's neighbourhood management pilots.

According to Chris Dickinson “The process of delivering each of these projects will not only result in the creation of much-improved and safer spaces for the whole community but will also enable the young people to build their confidence, skills and self-esteem as they devise action plans, take part in planning exercises and make presentations to key stakeholders who can help them turn their vision into reality.”

- **Someone to talk to**

Groundwork Wigan & Chorley has appointed a ‘progression beyond coordinator’ to enhance its service to young people. The coordinator – Harry Kelly - is a dedicated personal adviser who can provide one-to-one support and guidance to young people to enable them to progress into employment or further learning.

Harry says “The decision to appoint the post was made after evaluating a range of learning programmes offered by the Trust. The report said that although the programmes were successful in themselves, the lack of opportunity to receive one-to-one counseling and advice was a major barrier preventing participants from going onto other learning opportunities or finding jobs.” Harry provides information, advice, guidance and personal support to young people engaged in the Trusts youth programmes, working with them to help raise their aspirations and remove barriers to progress. He also keeps in touch with the young people for 12 months afterwards to check on progress.

6. Conclusion

The debate around improving services and outcomes for young people is immensely broad and it is evident that a clear priority for the review will be the challenge of resourcing support services for vulnerable children and families locked in the ‘high harm, high cost’ cycle.

However, it is important that the review continues the process already underway within policymaking circles of recognising the value of ‘place’ in the lives of children and young people. Young people have a much more direct connection with their neighbourhood and the local environment than many other groups in society and have the potential to be a significant force both for good and bad.

In the development of youth services it will be important to recognise and realise the value that can be achieved from involving young people in decision-making and action around the concept of place.

In order to achieve more in this regard a number of perennial issues will need to be addressed as follows.

- Local places and public spaces are arenas within which a range of policy priorities connect – from anti-social behaviour to physical activity, from

play to biodiversity. This inter-connectedness needs to be recognised and managed both within central and local government.

- Over the last five years significant amounts of funding have been channelled into creating and improving public spaces, many with the involvement of or aimed at benefiting children and young people. The challenge now lies in securing ongoing revenue funding to maintain and manage high quality spaces in the long-term.
 - Much of the funding that has been accessed for many years to deliver projects that connect young people with their neighbourhoods – such as SRB and European structural funds - has disappeared or is in decline. There is an ongoing need for those bodies now taking forward regeneration investment decisions such as RDAs to recognise the value of social and environmental activity to creating prosperous communities and regions. At the same time there is a need to ensure that the investment priorities set by children's trusts and through LAAs balance the need for intensive family support and social care services with the benefits to be achieved from neighbourhood-wide programmes aimed at offering more generic provision for young people.
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