

The  Lines  
Between

  
YouthBorders



# A FORCE FOR GOOD:

Amplifying the third sector youth work workforce's contribution to economic growth and social change in the Scottish Borders.

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## Foreword: YouthBorders

*It is a privilege to introduce “A Force for Good” which is a landmark publication for Third Sector Youth Work in the Scottish Borders. The support of South of Scotland Enterprise to assist YouthBorders to further our vision and ambition has made this research possible, alongside the skills knowledge and experience of our research partner: The Lines Between.*

*YouthBorders facilitate a growing region-wide network of youth work associated organisations with a passionate and dedicated workforce sharing unparalleled access to young people's lives. The YouthBorders network is a richly diverse and innovative grouping of third sector organisations: some wholly powered by volunteers whilst the majority operate as ‘micro-organisations’ with an average of six employees. All of this activity is enabled by the volunteering capacity of board members and charity trustees, who contribute their time and strategic direction and fulfil the legal duties of employers.*

*We know that youth work changes lives. The evidence tells us so, our workforce contributes to these changes every day; working with more than 5000 young people each year. Youth work both identifies and realises the potential in every young person it reaches. Youth workers and young people as partners in learning make this happen.*

*At YouthBorders we want our sector to be connected, collaborative, respected and recognised. This research and recommendations enable us to understand the contemporary context for Third Sector Youth Work organisations and gives us a mandate to work alongside our membership, stakeholders and young people to create sectoral change in a manner which supports sustainability, Fair Work, Community Wealth Building and Inclusive Growth. I commend you to fully immerse yourself in all aspects of this report. Deepening our insight into the sector, its potential and its challenges will be critical to sector development, growth and sustainability. I hope that you will embark on this journey with us.*

*This report recognises the unique role and position of YouthBorders as a both a facilitative and a collaborative leader – bridging and branching between our members, stakeholders and young people. The report recommendations present a significant opportunity for improvement but will only be realised if there is core and sustained investment in our organisation where we can make measured growth to appropriately reflect the size of our aims, vision and potential; and to further the aspirations of our membership and the young people of the region.*

*YouthBorders believes that this report is the catalyst for our organisation and network in terms of workforce development, succession planning, sectoral recognition, and collaborative working. Together, with our members and stakeholders, we can realise the potential of young people in the Borders, supporting their social-economic success through the availability of high quality Third Sector Youth Work.*

**Haylis Smith**

**Chairperson, YouthBorders**



## Foreword: SOSE

*We are delighted to have been able to support YouthBorders in the commissioning of this report, which explores Third Sector Youth Work Workforce Development in the Scottish Borders. Across our region Youth Work offers services, projects and experiences beyond formal education settings. Youth Workers are passionate about helping young people to reflect, develop and grow, and walk alongside those young people at times when they are actively exploring what is important in their lives, and how they can build on this. In this regard, Youth Workers can make a difference to the young people who will make our communities better places.*

*We warmly welcome this research, the challenges and recommendations set out, and also the opportunities these findings will bring for YouthBorders and their members to develop their fantastic work to improve the lives of young people in the Scottish Borders. As one of the wider public stakeholders in team South of Scotland, we look forward to the ongoing conversations about supporting young people in our region.*

*As the economic development agency for the South of Scotland we are here to enable entrepreneurship, support our young people, create jobs, attract businesses, encourage innovation, work with communities, roll out Fair Work, and support and promote the wonderful environment and landscape we live in.*

*This report encapsulates many of our aims, and shows the potential Youth Workers have to support the development of skills, agency and leadership of our young people. These are the foundations for young people, who are key to Scotland's future economic success, making informed choices about their lives. Personal development through youth work nourishes young peoples' aspirations for themselves and the communities they live in. Youth work plays an invaluable role in enhancing skills and career pathways, employment and employability of young people. And all of this helps us collectively create opportunities to retain and attract young people in the South of Scotland.*

*This is an excellent report, and I would strongly encourage anyone with an interest in finding out more about youth work workforce development to take the time to read it.*

**Jane Morrison-Ross**

**Chief Executive, SOSE**

# Glossary of key terms

## Who are YouthBorders?

YouthBorders is the network of voluntary and community-based youth work organisations in the Scottish Borders, supporting and promoting good quality youth work. The organisation provides a strategic representative voice for a diverse membership network of universal and targeted youth work providers as well as engaging with public sector stakeholders on a range of strategic policy priorities impacting young people.

## What is Youth Work?



*“Youth work focuses on personal and social development – the skills and attributes of young people – rather than to ‘fix a problem’. Youth work is an educational process that engages with young people ... deepens a young person’s understanding of themselves, their community and the world in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive changes.” (National Youth Agency)*

Contemporary youth work in Scotland is documented in the National Youth Work strategy as: *‘An empowering process... one of the very few practices whose remit provides for young people to exercise genuine power – to take decisions, follow them through, and take responsibility for their consequences.’* (Education Scotland, 2014).

## What is the Third Sector Youth Work Workforce?

Youth Work in the Scottish Borders is delivered by a range of providers in a variety of contexts and settings. This includes the local authority CLD (Community Learning and Development) Youth Learning Team, school-based youth workers, uniformed youth groups such as Girlguiding and Scouts, national third sector youth organisations and a diverse network of small independent regional and local community-based youth groups and clubs.

Youth workers (paid and volunteers) are skilled adults who *‘enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential’* (NOS, 2008).

This research focuses on the workforce and sectoral development needs of Third Sector Youth Work (TSYW) workforce working or volunteering within not-for-profit by community or voluntary-based groups and organisations, many of whom are registered charities (SCIOs), Community Interest Companies (CICs), or constituted groups; but excluding uniformed youth organisations. YouthBorders estimate this to include 200 paid staff and 600 volunteers.

## How to use this report

This report provides a summary of the key findings of this important piece of research into the youth work workforce in the Scottish Borders. It is supplemented by two Annex documents:

- Annex A: Third Sector Youth Work in the Scottish Borders: **The Policy Landscape**
- Annex B: Understanding the Third Sector Youth Work Workforce in the Scottish Borders: **Research Findings**



## Why is this research important?

“Youth work is one of the most powerful community assets we have to help us create a better society in Scotland.” (YouthLink Scotland, 2021)

- i. If the South of Scotland is to grow and develop the stronger, fairer and sustainable economy at the centre of the new Regional Economic Strategy, it needs confident, skilled and optimistic young people. Third Sector Youth Work (TSYW) in the Scottish Borders needs to be understood, valued and adequately supported to play its crucial role in supporting young people as partners in the economic transformation of the South of Scotland<sup>1</sup>. By investing in and leading change in the TSYW workforce, stakeholders have the opportunity to ensure a positive future for the region and its young people.
- ii. Quality youth work makes a significant contribution to outcomes for young people and their communities. Youth work does this by fostering long-term relationships, providing role models, trusted community spaces and the opportunity to have experiences that help young people understand their potential, develop leadership and acquire knowledge and skills. The sector also plays a key role in delivering the principles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which the Scottish Government will incorporate into Scottish Law. However, the impact of youth work practice is not as recognised as it could be. This sector needs resources and support to ensure young people build their own capacity and become active citizens who remain in and contribute to the Scottish Borders economy.
- iii. YouthBorders commissioned this research, supported by South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), to develop insight into TSYW workforce and development needs in the context of furthering the socio-economic development of the Scottish Borders. There is a desire to align the sector more closely with the principles of the Scottish Government's Fair Work Framework. The Framework's five pillars are central to the research structure and findings, exploring Fulfilment, Security, Effective Voice, Opportunity and Respect.
- iv. This report is the result of a policy landscape review and primary research (surveys, interviews and focus groups) undertaken by independent researchers The Lines Between. This insight linked to the strategic local context collected through discussions with YouthBorders as the sector's network body and strategic representative.
- v. YouthBorders is a membership network of more than 40 voluntary and community-based youth organisations in the Scottish Borders. The organisation provides a strategic representative voice for TSYW and engages with public sector stakeholders on a broad range of strategic policy priorities impacting on young people. YouthBorders aims to increase collaboration and partnership across the network, ensure it is connected, empowered and represented, and to support their members to grow and develop as a

<sup>1</sup> [The Impact of Community-based Youth Work in Scotland \(2018\)](#)



workforce. This research focused on the experiences of this network, but the findings and experience are potentially wider and further reaching.

- vi. The findings highlight the workforce development needs of the sector and its fragility. They also showcase a professional, passionate and motivated workforce across diverse organisations who could make an even greater impact when working together. By understanding more about working conditions in TSYW, stakeholders can consider strategic investment in the sector, ensuring its long-term future and the success of the region and its young people.
- vii. There is more to understand about working conditions within the sector that was beyond the scope of this initial exploratory research, for example, the extent to which statutory sick and maternity pay is available, pension contribution thresholds, pay increments, and cost of living increases. These, and the wider issues explored in this research, are not challenges for TSYW alone; in a recent briefing, SCVO highlight the contribution the third sector makes to Scotland's economy and society. They note the need for the sector to be an integral part of the economic recovery from the pandemic by supporting communities, alongside funders and local authorities.

## What impact does Youth Work have in the Scottish Borders?

- ix. Youth Workers strive to improve the lives of young people and expand their opportunities by having a core focus on young people's education and skills outside of formal education. Youth work encompasses many different approaches to supporting young people, including group activities, one-to-one support, peer mentoring, befriending and outreach work. Participation in youth work is freely chosen by the young person and can take place in a broad range of settings, including evenings, weekends and holiday periods.
- x. Youth Workers tackle a range of issues from health and wellbeing and reducing anti-social behaviour to training, skills and employability. Some of the impacts, including specific benefits to young people in rural areas, are shown in the diagram overleaf.
- xi. As such, this activity contributes to tackling wider societal issues, for example tackling poverty, or safety issues such as child protection. The Youth Work Skills Framework<sup>2</sup> outlines the key skills that young people can develop through participation in youth work in Scotland, including confidence, resilience and communication.
- xii. The youth work sector contributes to economic development in three main ways: helping to tackle youth unemployment, improving skills that are valuable to the local economy, and promoting youth innovation and entrepreneurship. A 2016 YouthLink Scotland study of the economic and social impact of youth work<sup>3</sup> estimated that the total value of youth work in Scotland is at least £656 million – a return of £7 for every £1 of public investment.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/skills-framework/youth-work-skills-framework/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/1254/full-report-social-and-economic-value-of-youth-work-in-scotland.pdf>



### Impact of youth work on young people

Helping young people build a positive outlook and consider their futures	Working with young people who do not engage with schools	Supporting positive shifts in family dynamics	Engaging with young people who have additional support needs
Providing opportunities for accreditation and skills development	Helping young people to develop confidence and self-esteem	Supporting moves into employment, training, or enhancing employability	Introducing new experiences, including creative, sporting and social activities
Access to trusted, supportive adults	Opportunities for those experiencing rural isolation or transport poverty	Volunteering opportunities	Working with groups who feel marginalised in rural areas, e.g. LGBTQ young people
Making young people feel seen and valued	Advocating for resources for young people in areas with an older population	Engaging in a way that education and social work services may not be able to achieve	A trusted presence in rural areas

- xiii. Although the Scottish Borders faces challenges in growing its local economy, for example its ageing population and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on rural areas, there are exciting opportunities for growth. Examples of how YouthBorders members are supporting young people will skills and employability are included in the Landscape Review section of this report and include a diverse range of skills development covering employment transition, innovation and entrepreneurship and improving skills for participation in the workplace.
- xiv. Youth Workers have a particular form of access to young people by virtue of their approach and educational methodology, not only to reach the “disengaged” but also within universal population supporting prevention activities and focusing on the potential of each and every young person.

“Youth work provide[s] young people with opportunities to maximise their potential, through involvement in activities whereby they regained or further developed a sense of value in themselves.” (YouthLink Scotland, 2018)

- xv. The services and support provided by youth work and the wider third sector in Scotland during COVID-19 highlighted the critical role they can play in maintaining community resilience by supporting young people with employability and health and wellbeing. In their report<sup>4</sup>, the Scottish Government’s Advisory Group on Economic Recovery make a specific recommendation around taking this learning from COVID-19 crisis and protecting “the capacity and financial sustainability of the third sector, in recognition of its important role in building and strengthening social capital.” This includes examining longer-term funding arrangements for services and more flexible and collaborative approaches to procurement.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/towards-robust-resilient-wellbeing-economy-scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/>



## What have we found?

### **Workforce strengths**

- xvi. The TSYW workforce in the Scottish Borders has many strengths and has a significant reach within and across rural areas. Its positive impact on young people in the Scottish Borders is valued by young people, communities and stakeholders. Staff and volunteers feel fulfilled, deriving purpose, satisfaction and value from their roles and the sociable, rewarding nature of their work. Many join the workforce because they want to make a difference, having benefitted from youth work as a young person themselves.
- xvii. A breadth of skills and qualifications is evident across the workforce, reflecting the diversity of work delivered. Some have spent a whole career in youth work; others transitioned to the sector at a later career stage, bringing valuable skills, perspectives and experience. The workforce accesses a raft of training and is encouraged to do so by managers. This training is seen as important to maintaining skills, creating informal spaces to learn and to keep staff engaged. Delivery staff see a growing need for training on supporting young people with important issues, such as mental health. Managers described an appetite for knowledge about topics that play a critical role in organisational sustainability, including governance, management of trustees, financial planning, and measuring impact.
- xviii. Those in the workforce feel listened to. There are opportunities to develop skills, develop networks, and participate in training, and managers, delivery staff and volunteers are treated with dignity and respect. Staff health, safety and wellbeing is valued and monitored. The variety of approaches to flexible working offered by organisations in the sector are appreciated.

### **Funding and job security**

- xix. Funding creates many workforce issues. These include arrangements that perpetuate job insecurity, roles that do not provide a Real Living Wage<sup>5</sup> requiring top-ups from additional work, or contractual arrangements that ultimately drive decisions to leave the sector. For some, particularly junior roles, the challenges are stark – for example, insufficient hours or multiple jobs makes it difficult to get a mortgage. While the workforce is fulfilled, the pay and hours offered to some create conditions for in-work poverty.
- xx. The mix of short-term and medium-term funding of projects and roles creates uncertainty and disruption for both managers and staff. Organisations may lose staff and volunteers with skills and experience who seek out greater security. Staff turnover can also be disruptive for the young people themselves, who lose a valued, reliable and trusting relationship. There is some evidence that the workforce has normalised

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<sup>5</sup> The Real Living Wage (currently £9.50 per hour) is different to the UK government's National Living Wage (£8.91 per hour) in a number of ways: The Real Living Wage applies to anyone over the age of 18 (as opposed to the National Living wage which applies to those over the age of 25), is calculated based on the basic cost of living in the UK (as opposed to median earnings) and has a London weighting.



insecurity; as contracts have previously been renewed when new funding is secured, staff come to minimise their concerns and assume this will always happen.

- xxi. The project-to-project nature of contract opportunities creates instability, and there is a lack of senior capacity for long-term development work, which can lead to reactive approaches. There are barriers for small organisations who wish to gain organisational accreditation that may assist their efforts to win contracts, including an overwhelming workload for managers, and time-consuming application processes and costs.
- xxii. For managers, the funding model limits their ability to employ a deputy or undertake succession planning, potentially leading to burnout and a risk to their organisation's sustainability should they leave. A lack of desire among some junior workers to pursue a management career and a lack of local capacity for accredited learning and training are significant barriers to sector leadership.

### ***Training and Qualifications***

- xxiii. Barriers to continued training, qualifications and skills development are evident for TSYW organisations. Some staff suggested both time for and availability of training was an issue for their organisation, noting the importance of factors such as location, transport and costs for small services in rural areas. If training is only provided during working hours, it is a barrier for volunteers or part-time staff who supplement their income through jobs in other organisations. Stakeholders expressed a desire for closer working with youth work services to develop tailored accredited learning and training offers that are viable within workplace structures and meet development needs.
- xxiv. Workforce development issues identified in the research include achieving an inflow of sector entrants with the right skills and qualities for work with young people. There are difficulties in aligning the modern apprenticeship scheme to employment opportunities in small youth work organisations. It can be difficult to secure funding to train volunteers who may become staff. Those who transitioned to successful youth work roles from a different career often do so by accident, reflecting the sector's lack of visibility.



## Recommendations

- xxv. This research has identified the significant strengths that characterise the TSYW workforce, and the key role youth work plays in delivering positive outcomes for young people in the Scottish Borders. To sustain and develop the sector further and ensure it is aligned with the economic development objectives of the South of Scotland, all partners must act collectively to address the pressing need to build its capacity. YouthBorders is uniquely placed to utilise its network to share the research, instigate a focus on workforce development and co-produce solutions, but must have sufficient additional resources to fulfil this vital role. For example, YouthBorders can:
- Support staff and volunteer development by encouraging more networking across the sector.
  - Promote to funders the importance of TSYW organisations' presence in rural areas, and their success in reaching disengaged youth.
  - Provide guidance on organisational development in the form of support for managers and training for trustees.
  - Encourage closer links between youth work organisations and further education providers of youth work qualifications/apprenticeships (e.g. colleges).
  - Champion new approaches to funding, for example long-term funding arrangements, an annual funding agreement, or regional funding packages for youth work.
- xxvi. The YouthBorders network should be involved at an early stage. For example, to determine and prioritise the specific issues to focus on, or network communication could centre on disseminating the plan of action and articulating the change YouthBorders seeks to achieve for its members. Either way, there should be clear messages about how members and partners can support such ambitions and how young people and their organisations across the Scottish Borders can benefit from TSYW workforce development.
- xxvii. We suggest that YouthBorders adopts a **three-stage approach** to build on the workforce strengths and meet the challenges identified in this research:





## 1. Establish priorities for action

- xxviii. There are many issues that YouthBorders and partners could focus on, grouped into three key areas:

### ***Staff and volunteer development***

1. Encouraging and enticing new recruits, raising the profile of the youth work sector and its impact, and seeking member organisations' cooperation to increase work experience and volunteering.
2. Working with TSYW organisations and stakeholders (Scottish Borders Council, Borders College, Skills Development Scotland, DYW Borders) to develop pathways and routes into the sector for young people and for adult entrants to the workforce.
3. New recruits and entrants must acquire new skills and whilst some are innate, managers recognised the importance of training and accredited qualifications to develop a range of professional skills.
4. Address knowledge gaps identified by all staff and remove barriers to training. For example, provision of free, locally accessible training at convenient times is required in response to learning needs and demands identified in the research.
5. Identifying routes to support career transitions to senior or management levels within organisations and the sector.
6. Encouraging engagement with the CLD Standards Council for Scotland to support registration of associate and full membership by the TSYW workforce and use of the CLD Standards Mark for training providers.

### ***Organisational development***

7. Actively develop managers' roles; sharing responsibilities and activity with Youth Workers while addressing succession planning in the process, and considering leadership, governance, operational, strategic and performance/evaluation needs as elements integral to organisational improvement.
8. Helping organisations to effectively collect data to measure and demonstrate their impact and the quality and value of the youth work they deliver. Democratising this activity could alleviate pressures on managers and build skills and experience in project staff.
9. Establishing guidance and tools for line management, supervision and appraisal, and/or offering a mediation capacity if members of the workforce have concerns about issues within their organisation.
10. Engage in trustee training to improve governance and enhance the relationship between managers and their boards.
11. Facilitate support and sharing of services for infrastructure and support systems for small and micro-organisations e.g. IT support, HR, Occupational Health, Legal Advice, Insurance, Data Management decisions.



### ***Shifts in funding, procurement and supporting income growth***

12. Facilitate initial discussions for potential partnerships and collaboration where youth work can improve outcomes through skills development, personal and social growth, and through opening up of new experiences and opportunities. Investing to succeed, not focusing purely on the problem and deficit, but also unleashing young people's potential as leaders and agents of change.
13. Championing recognition of the mutual benefits to both investors and recipients of coherent and consistent full cost recovery funding models that enable TSYW agencies to focus on their skilled engagement with young people and lessening the burden of persistent fundraising.
14. Actively support smaller TSYW agencies to present their work competitively in wider regional funding opportunities, such as commissioning and partnerships, which support Community Wealth and asset building, Inclusive Growth and Fair Work.
15. Encouraging recognition by funders that investing in staff/volunteer/peers training and qualification is a qualitative outcome for all concerned and should be resourced accordingly. The current workforce is dedicated and provides brilliant role models for young people but is fragile and will require extending and replacing in the short to medium term.
16. Encouraging stakeholders and investors to fund and enable coherent employment conditions and role requirements and provide appropriate salaries and hourly rates commensurate to the skills, qualifications and responsibility of the youth work role.

## 2. Determine how to address these priorities

- xxix. Develop a plan of action to address the priority workforce development issues. The program might include:
1. Measured expansion of YouthBorders support for its members. For example, enhanced training provision, support and guidance, or facilitative leadership within and beyond the network.
  2. Engagement with stakeholders who have the power to implement critical changes sought, for example: adjusting requirements for modern apprenticeships or advocating for changes to restrictive funding and contract terms and conditions.
  3. Local campaigns by and on behalf of the sector to enhance awareness of the value and impact of TSYW. YouthBorders members could be engaged to design and promote solutions which are appropriate for the regional context. This work could address these aims:
    - Encouraging and enticing new workforce entrants.
    - Stimulating partnership and collaborative activity.
    - Increasing contract opportunities for, and investment, in TSYW services in the Scottish Borders.



- Highlighting the importance of a revised funding structure that places emphasis on building capacity in the sector through consistent, secure and ideally greater value long-term funding.
- Celebrating the positive impact that youth work has on young people and the fulfilment that the workforce gets from their roles.

### 3. Identify responsibilities, timelines, resources and support to drive and assist change

- xxx. The workforce development issues identified in this research are complex; solutions will absorb time, energy and resources. This is an inclusive, long-term collaboration that resonates with a history of youth work in the Scottish Borders which has sought to be equitable and sensitive to local needs and perspectives over time.
- xxxi. Young people should be placed at the heart of every consideration made. They are integral to each decision made by TSYW organisations. Stakeholders must relate to their needs and make a commitment to empower young people at every opportunity to realise their potential.
- xxxii. An essential step in preparing for change and development is securing resources, assigning responsibilities, and setting key milestones.



## Recommendations for other stakeholders

- xxxiii. While YouthBorders play a significant role as a 'facilitative leader' there is also an element of 'collaborative leadership' required. They are not solely responsible for making the sector more attractive and effective. YouthBorders has a role to play in enabling the process to bring about change. However, for that to be effective will require the active participation of YouthBorders members to develop capacity for effective youth work practice in the context of their own local priorities and objectives. All other stakeholders therefore have a critical complementary role in encouraging action and taking responsibility for improving the sector.
- xxxiv. Managers and trustees of TSYW organisations can reflect on the resonance of the research findings with their own workplace and workforce. Their role in developing their staff, volunteers and organisation is vital and while YouthBorders can assist managers and trustees of member organisations, other stakeholders should consider ways in which they can support these senior positions. Management must also encourage staff to speak freely to inform and further quality youth work practice; this skilled and passionate workforce feels a duty to the young people they work with and can drive positive change if their views are listened to.
- xxxv. For funders and investors, this report makes a clear case for more holistic, certain and long-term funding arrangements. This will create security for staff, management and young people who can be more confident in the future of their role and their organisation. Certainty over funding allows organisations to create the conditions for secure and 'fair' employment with "flexibility by design", allowing new entrants into the sector and building capacity through increased junior management experience.
- xxxvi. The fragility of the funding of the sector ultimately affects the quality, consistency and availability of youth work in the Scottish Borders and the potential of its young people. For this research to have an impact, stakeholders including funders, central and local government, regional development and TSYW must all consider how they can best support the workforce.
- xxxvii. If the South of Scotland is to grow and develop the stronger, fairer and sustainable economy at the centre of the new Regional Economic Strategy, it needs confident, skilled and optimistic young people. By investing in and leading change in the TSYW workforce, stakeholders have the opportunity to ensure a positive future for the region and its young people.