



Edinburgh Youth and Children's Work Strategy 2023-2028



Emily

Emily is 17 years old and has been attending the Youth Agency for approximately 7 years. Emily had a particularly difficult childhood after losing both of her parents. While Emily does have an extended family and step-family, they are not particularly close. She does not have any family members looking out for her and has expressed how alone she has felt.

Because Emily does not have much family support she has looked to friends to fill the void. Emily tried hard to find a peer group that would accept her. As a result she was easily influenced and would go along with things that she did not really want to do. She could also be very temperamental. If her opinions were not agreed with or things did not go in her favour she would become moody and stomp off which alienated her. The choices that she made were not always considered and were, at times, quite destructive.

Emily lacked guidance from an adult to support her to make better choices, to not judge her and to have someone other than her peers looking out for her.

Staff have always been available to Emily for support and guidance whether that be in a drop-in session or for one on one time. If Emily faced anything that she was unsure of such as filling out forms or making important decisions she knew that she could contact the Youth Agency and help would be given.

Emily has learned to trust staff and has opened up about her life including her background, grief, family and relationships. This has allowed staff to be more sensitive when discussing issues Emily finds most difficult. Although Emily isn't always open to others opinions and struggles to seek support, she has asked staff for help and advice and has said how important this is to her.

Over the years that Emily has attended the Youth Agency she has grown and matured into a confident and responsible adult. She is making good choices and has reduced her circle of friends to a close group that she trusts and feels supported by. After a difficult journey she is focused and happy. She knows what she wants to do with her life and has found a job in childcare which she is enjoying and doing well in.

She is learning to drive and is also looking for a place to live independently. When she finds this staff will be available to support the transition and to help make it successful.

Definition of Youth and Children's Work

- Young people choose to participate
- The work must build from where young people are
- Youth and children's work recognises the young person and the youth/children's worker as partners in a learning process

Youth and children's work is an educational practice contributing to children and young people's learning and development. In Edinburgh, youth and children's work:

- Engages with children and young people aged 5-25 years within their communities, including communities of geography and of interest
- Acknowledges the wider networks of peers, community and culture
- Supports the child or young person to realise their potential and to address life's challenges critically and creatively
- Takes account of all strands of diversity
- Can be universal and targeted/referred

Youth and children's work takes place in a variety of settings including community venues, schools, youth cafés and on the street, whilst using numerous approaches such as outdoor pursuits, drama workshops, health initiatives, peer education and single issue and single gender work to engage with children and young people. It aims to provide prolonged and stable engagement over time.



Felix

When Felix first came to Crew, it was to attend the Pre-Pride Party. Felix immediately felt at ease with the Crew staff and found that they could comfortably chat with them. During the Edinburgh Pride march, Felix asked about accessing Crew services.

“I feel like when I’ve gone to other groups, that it’s taken me like three months to feel comfortable... here (at Crew), I felt comfortable straight away”.

Following the event, Felix began to come to the Crew drop-in and disclosed to a support worker that they were experiencing difficulties at home. Felix also disclosed that they would occasionally participate in high risk-taking behaviours such as sleeping outside, having unprotected sex and having support of solely older men. Alongside the drop-in, Felix participated in eight individual support sessions covering safety, risk, empowerment and self-esteem and harm reduction. Felix was helped to identify what support they needed and planned pathways that would enable any further support that Felix required.

Through five months of engaging with Crew services, Felix has been able to develop their critical thinking skills when it comes to identifying and managing risk. Felix is aware of the support networks available to them and how to utilise this support. Felix reports that they take more time to think about their risk-taking behaviour and that they will continue to access Crew services for support as they begin to look at moving into their first tenancy and accessing further education.

“I feel very open talking about private things with the Crew staff, I trust them. I wouldn’t go there if I didn’t trust you guys... Crew helped me actually stop and think about stuff I was doing”

Case study provided by Crew 2000

Strengths of Youth and Children’s Work

When youth and children’s work is embedded into communities, it brings many benefits. By offering **safe, welcoming and inclusive** spaces alongside professional and compassionate workers, youth and children’s work creates conditions to make positive changes to individuals and communities that can last a lifetime.

All youth and children’s work has at its core positive relationships between workers and young people. Often youth workers will become the **trusted adult** in the life of a young person. For many children and young people this support is in addition to a nurturing home life but for some young people, whose family relationships are difficult, the role of youth worker as a **trusted adult** becomes critical.

The relationship between worker and young person is the basis for all of the work that takes place. Youth workers:

- Encourage **aspiration and ambition**, often helping to create practical plans to help children and young people reach their goals
- Model **positive behaviour** and strategies
- Provide **reliable information** on different issues that affect the lives of young people including drug, alcohol and tobacco use, sexual health and healthy relationships
- Support young people at significant **transitions** in their life including transitions between primary and high school, to further or higher education, to jobs, and to independent living and adulthood

Youth and children’s work is **flexible and responsive**. Through their relationship and ongoing contact with young people, workers are well placed to recognise signs of distress, neglect or abuse, to advocate for young people, and to facilitate participation in support and planning processes.

Youth work also links to **public policy** areas and provides support which can help to achieve good outcomes. Areas where youth work is an active partner include:

- Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)
- Child Poverty Action Plans
- Whole Family Wellbeing Fund
- Community Mental Health Framework
- The Promise
- Pupil Equity Fund

Communities benefit from youth and children's work through, for example:

- Recreation and diversionary activities
- Streetwork, meeting young people outside in the places they hang out
- Working with partners to recognise and respond to local concerns such as anti-social behaviour.
- Helping to meet gaps in provision in areas like sexual health, drug and alcohol awareness

Youth and children's work is both **prevention** and **early intervention**. Because youth and children's work addresses the issues that affect young people in their lives, such as unhealthy relationships, risk-taking behaviour and mental health, it helps to develop knowledge and strategies that they can draw on throughout their lives. This supports other services by preventing the escalation of difficulties and easing the pressure on stretched resources such as CAMHS.

Youth and children's work offers a high **social return on investment**. Investing resources in the lives and wellbeing of young people is an opportunity to save money in the long term. This, coupled with the commitment of professionals and the significant contribution of volunteers, makes youth and children's work great value for money.



Transition

This was a targeted group to support the transition to high school. It met weekly offering a range of activities to help young people build relationships and familiarise themselves with the school community.

The summer sessions included day trips and activities in the local area near the school. This helped the young people get used to travelling to the school by walking or bus. Maintaining relationships over the summer helped reduce anxiety over the long wait to the beginning of term. Sessions were delivered in partnership with the school and with support from active schools to deliver sports sessions.

The club made a very positive impact on the transition to secondary school and young people expressed they are more confident,

“The club has helped me meet new friends, helped me know my way around school, helped me feel more confident”

Their parents and carers talked about changes in behaviour at home.

“Without her time spent with the transition club she would have really struggled with her transition visit to high school. The transition club has enabled her to embrace the challenge of starting high school, combating her anxieties and pushing herself to take on new challenges.”

Case study provided by City of Edinburgh Council



Youth and Children's Work Outcomes

National and local research has shown that young people participating in youth and children's work achieve many positive outcomes, including:

Confidence

In 2018, an analysis of 129 stories collected from young people across Scotland showed that 93 (72%) said youth and children's work had increased their confidence, maturity, self worth and sense of identity.

[impact-of-community-based-universal-youth-work-in-scotland-november-2018.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

Skills for Life and Work

In 2019, an analysis of stories from 96 young people involved in youth and children's work in Edinburgh found that 92% had developed skills for life and work, such as leadership, independence and coping strategies.

[universal-youth-work-study-in-edinburgh-final.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

Relationships with Friends and Adults

The young people's stories also showed the positive impact of youth and children's work on their relationships with other young people (54%) and adults (34%). This has remained an important outcome during Covid-19. 22 stories collected from young people participating in LGBT Youth Scotland's digital youth work in 2020, showed that 83% said that this had reduced their social isolation during lockdown.

[lgbt-ys-digital-yw-research-report.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

Learning and Achieving

The young people's stories also highlighted that youth and children's work provided opportunities for learning and achievement (46%) including accredited qualifications and positive destinations. These opportunities are especially important for young people at risk of disengaging from school in the wake of Covid-19. An evaluation of 64 Youth Work Recovery Fund projects across Scotland found that 61% of young people (including over 900 in Edinburgh) had increased their engagement with learning as a result.

[ywerf-report-2022-final.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

Health and Wellbeing

In 2017-19, feedback from 1457 young people participating in youth work across Scotland, using the Getting It Right For Every Child Wellbeing Wheel, found that they ranked their wellbeing higher in a youth and children's work setting (average 4.41/5) than in school (average 3.85/5). This difference was higher for young people whose wellbeing at home was low (below 3/5). For this group, wellbeing at school was also low (2.82/5) while wellbeing in a youth work setting remained relatively high (3.81/5).

[SHANARRI Results | youth-work \(youthwork.info\)](#)

Again, the impact of youth and children's work on physical and mental wellbeing has been confirmed, in the context of Covid-19, by the LGBT Youth Scotland digital youth work evaluation in 2020 (77% of young people) and the Youth Work Recovery Fund evaluation in 2021 (79% of young people).



Youth Participation

The Scottish Youth Parliament held elections in November 2021. An initial group of around 60 young people were supported to note interest, submit profiles, and ultimately campaign and stand in the election.

A variety of methods were used to engage with the interested young people. These included holding meetings on TEAMS and arranging face to face meetings. The young people felt that meeting face to face was more beneficial so three workshop sessions in Princes Street Gardens were organised over the summer. Maintaining this support over the summer was in part responsible for enabling Edinburgh to register the highest number of expressions of interest from potential candidates and then fielding the most candidates (26) of any local authority in Scotland. We also achieved the highest voter turnout in Edinburgh since 2015 with 2,456 young people voting, despite many of the usual campaigning activities being curtailed because of the pandemic.

All of the young people completed online training workshops, attended two sittings, and have built positive relationships with each other and other MSYPs in Scotland.

Members of the Edinburgh MSYP group are involved in various roles within the committees for Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs, Justice, Health and Wellbeing and Equalities. They are also involved in the Women's Empowerment Working group, Youth Ethics Advisory Panel, and the Black and People of Colour Movement Working Group. The group attended the youth pride event and local youth groups with consultation stalls. They have also consulted on issues and motions with the use of surveys within their own constituencies.

Looking ahead, the group will hold monthly meetings, continue to work within their constituencies to consult around SYP motions and the SYP campaign priorities and work with stakeholders to develop youth participation opportunities in Edinburgh.

Case study provided by City of Edinburgh Council



Youth and Children's Work Response to Challenges

One of the key strengths of youth and children's work in Edinburgh is our flexible and creative response to challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, mental health and poverty.

Covid-19 Pandemic

When lockdown restrictions were introduced in March 2020, youth and children's work services were **agile** in their response to continue relationships and **meet the needs** of children, young people and families.

Restrictions meant youth and children's work needed to find alternative ways of maintaining **relationships and support**, particularly when the only delivery method available was online. A youth work approach was maintained during this period, with organisations identifying what online platforms and spaces young people wanted to share with youth workers. To sustain engagement with services organisations found creative ways of doing this - including delivery of activity packs to participate in sessions, such as cooking or baking kits.

Restrictions were eased later in 2020 to permit the delivery of streetwork and outdoor work, this led to many organisations undertaking delivery of services in **new ways** from previous core services. This period also enabled youth and children's workers to maintain relationships in-person by using "walk and talk" sessions.

Many youth and children's work organisations widened their role beyond pre-pandemic areas of work to **respond to the needs** of children, young people and families.

Areas of work developed in response to Covid-19 and are now an ongoing component of youth and children's work include:

- Engaging parents and carers in family support work
- Delivery and provision of food
- Supporting with digital learning, through the provision of devices and data packages



Digital Intergenerational Practice

The Covid-19 epidemic brought massive changes and challenges for all youth and children's work agencies. One of the biggest challenges for the Citadel Youth Centre was how to keep connecting isolated younger and older people in our intergenerational Old's Cool project. We adapted by using digital technology to enable young people to communicate with older people in their own homes. We distributed digital devices to the older people and Citadel volunteers even gave Zoom tutorials in their front gardens. Whenever restrictions allowed, we met the young people in person – in socially distanced groups – and connected with the older people on Zoom on a big screen.

The hybrid intergenerational projects we delivered during Covid-19 included:

COVID-19 STORIES. Working with local graphic facilitator Emer O'Leary, young people were trained in the use of visual storytelling techniques. The young people then used these new skills to interview older people about their experiences of COVID-19 over Zoom.

Archaeology in Leith. Archaeology Scotland helped young people find out about Leith's rich past, connecting with older people over Zoom, to capture their personal histories of Leith. The group went on to create a custom set of Citadel 'Leith' Top Trumps cards.

Citadel Love Stories. Over three online workshops, this creative writing project explored lifetime experiences of love and relationships in LGBT+ young and older people. Using Intergenerational storytelling both generations' experiences of love and relationships were captured in the following zine: <https://bit.ly/3liGVmp>.

Feedback from participants in these groups included:

"Zoom can be hard at times, but it's always amazing to see the young people." (Older Person)

"A lot of people say that the young and older generations don't come together. But if you see through the lines, they can come really close to one another." (Young Person)

"Until this project I hadn't even thought about what it was like for older people. It's made me realise we are really lucky." (Young Person)

For more information, top tips and case studies on Digital Intergenerational Practice check out the Old's Cool Digital Intergenerational Practice Toolkit: <https://bit.ly/3MQdQkM>

Case Study provided by Citadel Youth Centre

Research demonstrates that Covid-19 has further compounded already existing inequalities including poverty and mental health:

Ensuring our future: addressing the impact of COVID-19 on children, young people and their families (scotphn.net)

It is estimated that 23% of children and young people in Edinburgh are living in poverty with considerable geographical variations.

Edinburgh Poverty Commission

Poverty

The cost of living crisis is affecting young people both materially and emotionally. Young people are increasingly aware of financial worries in the home and anxious about the future.

Youth and children's work serves many communities with higher levels of need through universal youth work. Alongside this, community-based organisations offer a number of targeted interventions designed to reach children and young people experiencing challenges associated with deprivation.

Mental Health

Community-based youth and children's work, provides prevention and early intervention services for children and young people. Children and young people benefit from increased support within their communities and from adults with whom they already have a trusted relationship.

There are approximately 200 referrals per week, in Edinburgh, to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), 25% of these referrals are not progressed due to not meeting thresholds and an early intervention support being considered more appropriate.

Through community-based universal youth and children's work services support is provided at the time children and young people need it, sometimes avoiding the need for an onward referral to more acute services.

76% of young people were concerned about their own mental health and wellbeing and 90% were concerned for other's mental health and wellbeing

Lockdown Lowdown Local Authority Results Summary Edinburgh



Youth Work and Poverty

We know that many of the families we work with live with food insecurity and young people have told us how they have not eaten since their school lunch, how they struggle during school holidays and how things are okay for a week or two but towards the end of the month money runs out. Food is not the only issue, however. Something that often goes unseen is the impact of a lack of toiletries and hygiene products on young people. We have seen the embarrassment of young people as they tried to downplay this and to put on a brave face, accepting that toiletries are not a priority when their families need to buy food or pay bills.

We provide support where we can including help accessing the food bank and ensuring that hot, healthy food is available at all of our sessions. Since the pandemic we have also ensured that we have hygiene products easily available for young people to take for themselves and their family including soap, shampoo, conditioner, shower gel, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and sanitary products. Dignity is important so we do not limit access or ask questions as they may make young people feel self-conscious, embarrassed or less likely to take what they need.

A case study from Wester Hailes Youth Agency



Youth and Children's Work Priorities 2023-28

Youth and children's work in Edinburgh will continue to enable young people to achieve the wide range of outcomes identified by national and local research (see above). Specific priorities will be informed by the challenges facing children, young people and their families in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, including:

Reducing Inequality and the Impact of Poverty

Providing access to social, educational and recreational opportunities, information, advice and support for children and young people from disadvantaged families and communities.

Health and Wellbeing

Helping children and young people to be physically healthy and emotionally resilient, particularly as they recover from the impact of the Covid pandemic on mental health.

Closing the Attainment Gap

Supporting children and young people who have disengaged from education during Covid-19 to return to school and move on to positive destinations in training, further education and employment.

Rights and Participation

Asking children and young people what is important to them, including their views on youth and children's services.

It is important to recognise that all these priorities can be achieved through universal, open youth and children's work, as well as more targeted services.

Youth and Children's Work Strategic Actions 2023-28

To support these priorities for children and young people, the following strategic actions for youth and children's work have been identified:

Develop the skills of the youth and children's workforce

Provide access to a youth work led local training programme delivered by a range of partners and include essential topics (i.e. child protection, emergency first aid and trauma informed practice) alongside topical training (i.e. Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenting and substance use awareness).

An annual training report will be published, including data on increase of skills, knowledge and confidence, alongside case studies on the impact of training.



"When I was 11 my dad passed away and [they] helped me hugely by getting me involved in camps etc. That year I was starting high school and they helped me through that. I have always been able to talk to the staff about things because they have been a massive support for me. If [it] wasn't here I'm not sure who would've helped me as there is nowhere else like here."

The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Edinburgh

Communicate with a range of stakeholders

Engage with a range of stakeholders including elected members, public sector and other interested organisations to raise awareness of the role and impact of youth and children's work.

Youth and children's work will be represented within Edinburgh Community Planning Partnerships and other local networks.

Increase partnership working between youth and children's services

Identify opportunities for partnership working through the Edinburgh Youth and Children's Work Strategy Group, alongside local youth work providers forums.

Regular youth and children's work events will be held, providing opportunities for partnership working, raising the profile of youth and children's work and highlighting good examples of practice.

Improve equality and diversity within youth and children's work services

Support youth and children's services and create opportunities to improve equality and diversity within services; including engagement in decision making and increasing participation in services.

Work in partnership with diverse communities to develop and share "Top Tips" for inclusive youth work practice.

This Strategy will be regularly reviewed by the Edinburgh Youth and Children's Work Strategy Group. This will involve:

- Gathering evidence of effective practice from providers across the city,
- Listening to the views and experiences of children and young people
- Identifying and responding to gaps in services and emerging priorities.



Harris

Harris was a previous participant with the Green Team on our Mental Health & Well Being Programme - Thrive. They were in recovery from an eating disorder and experiencing anxiety around food related issues. Through regular weekly visits to the Thrive project over the course of a year, Harris was able to experience environmental volunteering, build confidence and improve their anxiety and mental health issues. As they moved on from school, Harris was looking at the options around the next steps in their life. The Green Team encouraged Harris to remain involved and step into a leadership position through a new volunteering role. Harris received mentoring and took part in training on health and safety, conservation and ecology, and child protection. They were offered lots of support and started volunteering regularly with some of the Green Team's younger participants.

*Harris noted **"Becoming a young leader with the Green Team has been an amazing experience. I have been able to meet many amazing people and have felt supported and valued through it all."***

Harris has become a valued member of our volunteer team. They also applied for their first job in Environmental Education and got the position. They were able to use their experience from volunteering with Green Team at the interview and we were able to provide a reference for them.

Harris says:

"This has helped me build confidence and attempt things I never thought I would be able to do. Skills I've learned include conservation, group facilitation and managing responsibility. However, it has also allowed me to learn to be more comfortable being myself, to deal with unpredictability, and manage anxiety.

With these new skills and through the support from the people at the Green Team, I have managed to get my first job as an Environmental Educator. I am so grateful for being able to be involved with the Green Team and look forward to continuing to volunteer with them."

