



# Youth work in a time of change

**Young people and workers share  
their experiences and learning**

Hosted by Spotlight <http://wearespotlight.com/>  
Poplar Harca, London, 27 October 2016

Brighton  
Poplar, London  
Lambeth, London  
Norfolk  
Knowsley

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# Youth work in a time of change

Youth work faces difficult times across the country with financial cuts of over 65% changing the range and extent of the youth work offer for young people where they live. Brighton is no exception and the Council is reviewing future options about what youth services do and how they could be run. Brighton young people have been active for the last three years in coming together across areas and interests to share their views and to influence the future.

**In October 2013** about 50 young people from across Brighton shared what youth work had achieved in their own lives and summarised their participation priorities for Brighton Youth Collective to build a stronger voluntary sector platform for youth work in the city.

**In October 2015** over 40 young people contributed to the council's review. They shared what youth work meant to them. They described how spend should be apportioned between open access provision and specialist or targeted support. They analysed the strengths and difficulties of four options on how to run youth services in the future in Brighton.

**In October 2016**, 22 young people and 12 workers met in London at the request of young people from Brighton. The event was hosted by Spotlight youth centre in Poplar.

**The aim** was to find out how four different areas held on to and developed youth work in a time of change so young people could gain knowledge and apply learning in each area and support Brighton young people in their campaign to secure a better future for youth work. Presentations were given by the four invited groups, followed by questions, discussion and taking a stand on four significant themes arising as reported below. There are hyperlinks for further information and short films.

Part of the story shared at this event is how in England there have developed - out of extreme adversity - working models for youth led and co-owned commissioning and providing of youth work. These are pioneering services and probably unique across the globe. It is an extraordinary achievement and one we are proud to share and to celebrate.

## Those who took part were

**Brighton:** Lauryn, Jessie, Aaron, Kayleigh, Carl, Tilly, Lily, Farrah, Jamie, Amy, CJ, Rebecca, Mike, Helen, Miche, Adam, Wendy.

**Spotlight**, Poplar Harca: Helal Ahmed <http://wearespotlight.com/>

**Young Lambeth Co-op:** <http://www.younglambethcoop.co.uk/> Hollie, Chloe, Marie, Chantoi, Rachel, Daniel.

**Norfolk:** Chelsea and Christina, Anita, Anastasia.  
<http://benjaminfoundation.co.uk/youth-advisory-board-breckland>

**Knowsley Youth Mutual:** <http://www.youthmutual.co.uk/> Katie, Katie, Tony, Colin, Maxine.

**Next steps** are that young people in Brighton are carrying forward their campaign to secure the best possible youth work provision across the city. The examples explored at this event give young people evidence of excellent youth work provision in a time of change and a range of models to draw upon for how youth work can be run effectively with young people at the heart of decision making.

# What is youth work?

The whole group introduced themselves and together formed an agreement about the values at the heart of youth work and the essence of youth work activity.

The heart of youth work:	Some key youth work activity:
• Community	• Guidance
• Friendship	• Activities
• Trust	• Support
• Mutual	• Advice
• Inclusive	• Opportunities
• Respect	• Volunteer work
• Acceptance	

## Youth work in a time of change

Over the last eight years, our neighbourhoods and communities have seen severe cuts to services we rely on. This includes cuts to local authority funded youth work in England of about 65%, alongside similar cuts in funding to voluntary youth organisations.

But young people continue to need and to want the non-formal support and advice, the activities and opportunities and the participation in things that affect them where they live which are provided through youth work.

So what has been happening to youth work in this time of change? Are youth workers and young people doing anything to respond? Brighton young people wanted to find out and asked four groups to share their experiences so as to learn from in their campaign to influence the future of youth work in Brighton. Each group of young people and workers gave a short presentation followed by questions and conversation.

Each presentation was based around these five questions:

- What sparked the need to look to do something different?
- How were young people involved in the early stages of thinking and development of a new ways of doing things?
- What's the youth offer now? What youth services are available?
- How do you run things?
- How do young people continue to have a voice and influence?
  - Listening and responding: how young people's concerns and issues are heard and responded to
  - Doing stuff: how some young people get involved in tasks that support the activity of the organisation
  - Running things: how some young people get involved in helping with the direction and development of the organisation.

# Spotlight, Poplar, London, run by Poplar HARCA

<http://wearespotlight.com/> [www.poplarharca.co.uk](http://www.poplarharca.co.uk)

Helal Ahmed ([helal@wearespotlight.com](mailto:helal@wearespotlight.com)) welcomed the group and outlined how Spotlight came about. Spotlight is a youth centre, funded and managed by the Housing Association, Poplar HARCA. The website has a time line of developments called Story.

## Key points

1. Tower Hamlets local authority had a strong track record in youth work with a budget of £8m a year.
2. The local authority came to see the voluntary sector as best placed to deliver youth work.
3. After 12 successful years of this model of the local authority commissioning much of youth work to the voluntary sector, politicians and leaders decided to take back youth work within the authority. The crisis was caused by adults thinking they knew better.
4. Poplar Harca is a local Housing Association. We believed this council decision to be wrong and not in the best interests of the residents and tenants we served across the Borough. Poplar Harca is a big local provider of neighbourhood management services and so it felt best placed to run youth services.
5. While Poplar Harca came under some attack, we believed in what we stood for and held on. We had a youth board already in place and it was their voice which ensured the development of Spotlight.
6. Our offer includes open access youth work for 200-300 young people each day using Spotlight. This work is built on relationships and knowing the young people. We have good relations with schools and share the site.
7. Our model is based on partnership based on shared values and respect for young people and young people guiding what happens here in the building.
8. We link with neighbourhood groups and have an outreach programme so that our youth work is not just about the centre.
9. The age range is 11 to 19, and up to 25 for those with additional needs, but age boundaries are kept as flexible as possible. Young people see the building as theirs and treat each other and the building respectfully.
10. There are 12 trained youth workers in the core team, with additional neighbourhood engagement workers, 45 volunteers and over 10 agency partners offering specialist support about for example child protection, substance misuse and mental health.

## Learning

- Whatever the model of youth work, relationships are more important than buildings.
- While the building is the focus for youth work, the mission is to cover the whole area.
- The core is good quality youth work built on mutual trust, respect and relationships, with young people at the heart.

# Young Lambeth Coop (YLC)

<http://www.younglambethcoop.co.uk/>

Holly, Chloe and Daniel shared how YLC was established as a [co-operative organisation](#) separate from the council with young residents as members working through a hub and spokes commissioning model based on needs identified through consultation with children and young people.

## Key points

1. In 2012 Lambeth council sought to make significant cuts to youth services in the Borough and wanted to explore a different model of partnership, leading to the development of a hub and spokes model whereby Young Lambeth Coop was established, contracted by the council to be the commissioning body for a range of children and young people youth work related activities.
2. In 2014, Lambeth Council gave YLC its budget for the provision of youth and play services. This means members of YLC are now responsible for deciding which [youth and play services](#) the money should be spent on. Services include 1 o'clock clubs, adventure playgrounds, early intervention programmes and accredited training.
3. YLC budget for commissioning services is now £1.2m covering two years.
4. YLC looks to be the “friendly commissioner”, making sure the Engagement team links with schools, colleges and youth clubs sharing information and understanding need.
5. YLC works as the commissioner, identifying needs, agreeing priorities, setting clear criteria and looking at bids. Decisions are made by a panel of young people.
6. Young people are involved at all levels except that legally to be on a board of directors you have to be over 16; in the YLC this is currently set at 18. Young people are involved through the steering group, as members of staff, as commissioners, through the Youth Council and as assessors.
7. Consultation is vital to the commissioning process, based on the importance of understanding children and young people’s needs to feed into the commissioning process.
8. It is vital for YLC to remain active in keeping young people involved which is done through a range of methods like the online magazine and getting it as part of school coursework. [Membership](#) is over 7000. YLC has become the Borough’s centre for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and there are an increasing number of apprenticeships and work experience opportunities.
9. YLC is involved in raising money itself to contribute to the commissioning funds.
10. The AGM is a vibrant forum for young people to hold the Board and YLC to account.

## Learning

- “Commissioning with a friendly face.”
- Needs based commissioning through consultation with children and young people
- Involvement of young people throughout with members being the stakeholders with the right to vote sitting above the Board. As the leaflet says: “Being a co-operative means the organisation is owned by its members so that at the end of the day what the YLC does is up to you.”

# Norfolk

<http://benjaminfoundation.co.uk/youth-advisory-board-breckland>

Chelsea, Christina, Anita and Anastasia described how Norfolk County Council put in place a new model of youth work delivery through contracting a lead organisation in each of seven areas to set up a Youth Advisory Board to lead the commissioning process to ensure good quality youth work based on locally established need.

## Key points

1. In 2011, Norfolk County Council announced it was to [cut all its youth service](#) with immediate effect, despite a consultation responded to by over 2000 young people.
2. Senior officers (paid staff) in the Council considered how to get the Council to think differently and to retain its legal accountability for ensuring an effective youth offer remained available to young people across the county.
3. The Council put in place a model to contract a lead organisation in each of seven areas to create new youth work projects and support existing ones. The budget was £900k across the county.
4. The lead organisation was paid to employ youth workers with the role of setting up Youth Advisory Boards (YAB) to be part of the District decision making in each of the seven areas.
5. YAB is a group of young people and adult professionals with the job to develop existing and new youth services. Its purpose is to set the standards, support young people to develop new skills, ensure young people's access to youth programmes, involve young people in the design and delivery of local youth provision and to lead the quality assurance process.
6. About 15 [young commissioners](#) in each area are involved in a needs analysis which draws on quantitative sources (numbers and stats) and qualitative information (people's views and experiences), leading to an agreed set of priorities and the commissioning of services to meet those needs.
7. Work with young people supports their continued involvement. Young people are involved in all aspects of decision making but do not have legal authority.
8. Young commissioners are aged 13 – 19 and gain relevant training for their work and often stick with the task for a number of years.
9. YABs influence other commission bodies as well as determine their own spend.
10. Norfolk County Council is due to review the model and status of the YABs and the suggestion is it wishes to increase the aspects of consultation in their roles but reduce their power of decision making.

## Learning

- Young people are involved throughout the commissioning process through an organisation contracted by NCC which may be influenced by but is not led or run by young people. The Council can change the model at any time.
- Young people involved in the commissioning have support and training and move from being interested in issues affecting them in their own area to developing an understanding of wider needs of other young people to be responded to.
- The model is adaptable and can size up. It has distributed £620k in four years and an additional £181k for Positive Activities. 23 organisations have been commissioned. 93 people have acted as young commissioners. Much of the activity the YABs undertake is accredited.

# Knowsley Youth Mutual (NYM)

<http://www.youthmutual.co.uk/>

Katie, Katie, Tony and Colin shared the story of how Knowsley Youth Mutual arose from a significant reorganisation by the council to become a co-operative organisation run by its members who are young people and staff.

## Key points

1. In 2012 Knowsley Council was in financial crisis and looked at two options for its youth services: a) face up to 75% budget cuts or b) support the setting up of an independent organisation to manage and run youth services.
2. In 2014 it chose option b) to outsource its youth services and transferred its activity to “a spin out from the council into an organisation in its own right.” [Knowsley Youth Mutual \(KYM\) was formed](#) as a Community Benefit Society where currently 3000 members and 60 staff are legal stakeholders.
3. KYM is the single provider of open access and targeted youth support in Knowsley.
4. KYM is legally independent from the Council but the Council holds the main purse strings. KYM is under pressure from the Council to reduce the open access provision and increase the more fundable targeted youth work.
5. The Council had a budget of £1.6m for youth work. In 2014 KYM received £1.4m. In 2016 this was reduced to £800k with further cuts forecast for 2016. KYM has gained other contracts and funding so that it has a turnover of £2m this year.
6. Young people are involved throughout the organisation.
  - a. Members are the legal stakeholders in the company. There are 3000 young members and 60 staff members.
  - b. Each club has a youth club committee elected by its members.
  - c. Those on the youth club committees elect area committee members.
  - d. The area committees elect eight young people to the Representative Body which also includes eight staff and four partner and community organisation representatives. This group elects two chairs – one staff member and one young people, a secretary and treasurer, posts where young people and adults collaborate. This group nominates two young people who are over 16 to be on the Executive Board.
  - e. The Executive Board legally must be over 16. Its six Non-Executive Directors are appointed by the Representative Body. Two employees and two young people over 16 are elected by the membership and Executive.
7. There is an [Annual Members Meeting](#) which attracts many young people.
8. Power ultimately rests with the members, as seen over the vote to scrap subs despite financial difficulties because it was barring those who could not afford them.
9. Young people take part in difficult decisions seeking the greater good. In one case rent went up on the youth club building and the club had to shut, but this led to agreement to have a youth bus instead, an idea from young people.
10. Much attention is given to rewards and awards to mark young people’s involvement.

## Learning

- Setting up a new organisation brings opportunity. But it must take account of risks such as local authority funding reducing year on year and the costs of administration, financial management, fundraising, communications, building maintenance and upkeep that used to be managed and paid for by the council.
- Legal independence does not mean independence from the council in its influence over what is provided, for example in the balance between open access and targeted youth work. This is despite KYM fundraising bringing in the same amount again.
- The [co-operative principles](#) of KYM are legally binding on the organisation.

## Taking a stand

To draw out some key findings from the four presentations, the whole group took a stand on four issues on a line stretching from *NO not really* to *YES totally*.

1. Young people are more involved now in decision making than they were.		
No not really Some stood here	A bit <b>Most stood here</b>	Yes totally Some stood here
2. There's more money in youth work locally now than there was.		
No not really <b>Everyone stood here</b>	A bit	Yes totally
3. Young people get a better deal from youth work now than they did.		
No not really Some stood here	A bit <b>Most stood here</b>	Yes totally Some stood here
4. It is better to stick with how things are run now than to go back to how they were run then.		
No not really Some stood here	A bit <b>Most stood here</b>	Yes totally Some stood here

This taking a stand activity indicates that, while the changes and new organisational structures have led to more young people's participation, this has been in the context of money being lost to youth work in the same period. These changes have in some cases benefited young people receiving youth work but not always because of the drain on resources. For most of the group the changes caused by the cuts have helped improve how things are run a bit but not a lot; many would not see the changes as a good thing in themselves and would go back to how things were run if that meant more secure resources for youth work now and in the future.

## Messages to take home

Young people were pleased at the chance to meet and to share their experiences of sharing youth work in a time of change. Their messages to the young people from Brighton were:

- Keep the motivation
- Be persistent. It's worth it. Think about the service for young people you want.
- Show other young people in Brighton what you are standing up for. Be resilient.
- You know you are the voice. We are the voice.
- Be open to new ideas. Once you've started constantly look to improve. Gain new members. Reach out to other young people. Push for good quality assurance.
- Keep on fighting. We are the next generation.
- Stand together and don't be in competition.

## Next steps for Brighton young people

Young people meet in early November to look at this report, reflect and finalise it and consider the implications for their campaign for young people to get the best possible deal for youth work. The group will look to act as an umbrella body for the wider benefit of young people and take findings to elected members and senior officers in the council.