

National Youth Work Curriculum: Health

Acute



The national youth work curriculum

The first of its kind for 30 years, the national youth work curriculum is a go-to resource for health-focused organisations looking to improve life chances and maximise opportunities for young people within integrated health systems and in local places and neighbourhoods.

The curriculum sets out what youth work is and what it does. If you are a policy maker, service commissioner or senior leader, the curriculum will be an important point of reference for you. It will help you to meet your strategic and operational objectives, and to plan, coordinate, commission, oversee and support youth work related outcomes and provision in your area.

As the diagram on the front cover shows, the curriculum provides a learning framework based on the practice and process of youth work. It also takes account of national occupational standards, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the youth work outcomes framework, and associated quality standards.

Youth work: When the clock stops ticking

Making the transition from childhood to adulthood is often not a smooth path. Tricky transitions to adulthood can contribute to poor mental health and poor emotional well-being, especially if you are one of the thousands of young people who are living with trauma because of adverse childhood experiences, a traumatic incident like a violent or sexual assault, or the death of a friend or relative. Dealing with those sorts of experiences can be really hard: frightening, isolating, even life-stopping.

When it feels like everything has frozen in time and the clock has stopped ticking – in an A&E department, in the aftermath of surgery, or on a hospital ward – youth work can offer a vital helping hand. Whether it's finding support in relation to a prognosis, treatment or recovery plan, or the offer of a listening ear amidst all the silence and clamour, youth work has the power to reach out and help young people in a life-changing way.

At a time when the right surgical and clinical care is crucial, and access to advice and information is important, what also matters to young people is the trust they are able to build with an adult. That trust can be the jumping-off point for longer lasting relationships with young people, which form the bedrock of all youth work and make the world of difference to a young person at a time of crisis.

These relationships are always entirely voluntary, and they cannot be fashioned or forced by adults, however well intended. It is the young people who choose whether to become involved, and even when the health risks are serious, when to open up or to shut down. Such relationships are not easily built, but even within the unfamiliar confines of a hospital, they can be facilitated in ways that allow young people to begin to feel safe both physically and emotionally.

Youth work's ingredients for success include actively listening to what young people say, responding to their interests, needs and concerns, building on their aspirations and ideas, and helping to alleviate cycles of anxiety and frustration. By doing all these things and more, youth workers are able to co-create a safe jumping-off point from which young people can start to see themselves and their future differently. They learn new skills, develop confidence, discover how to make and act on decisions and, crucially, how to make their voices heard in relation to decisions made by others that affect their future lives.



Youth work makes an invaluable and unique contribution to young people's health, well-being and personal development. As many clinical staff would attest, the magic of youth work is a vital ingredient in young people's care.

The benefits of the youth work curriculum in healthcare settings

Youth Work works because at its heart is the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. The relationship is voluntary and never begins from a deficit position. This means that the strengths of the young person are valued and developed from the outset no matter the situation or environment which has brought the youth worker and young person together.

The skilled delivery of youth work and its ability to change the life chances of young people does not of course happen in a vacuum. It is supported by, and based on, a new national curriculum produced by the NYA. The curriculum offers a flexible learning framework developed by youth workers for youth workers and other people and organisations who want to deliver effective youth work. For policy makers, service commissioners and senior leaders who wish to know more about what youth work is and how it can help, the curriculum is an invaluable resource that will provide them with the necessary tools and understanding to transform how youth work is perceived and rolled out within clinical settings.

Research consistently shows that adopting youth work principles and methodologies promotes good physical, mental and sexual health and leads to better outcomes for young people. Even in the context of acute health settings, the curriculum offers an informal education process where learning grows through conversation, exploration and enhanced shared experience – the best learning methodology for unlocking young people's potential. By adopting these methodologies in commissioning frameworks, service specifications and delivery plans, youth work can operate in a complementary way alongside clinical interventions, helping young people to gain strength and hope even during the most challenging times.

The benefits of youth work extend beyond the young person too. The youth work curriculum also seeks to address other key issues in healthcare settings such as racial disparity and health inequalities, as well as helping to better meet the needs of neurodiverse and LGBTQIA+ populations. As the curriculum shows, it is the skills, knowledge and integrity of youth workers, together with the unique cultural understanding they bring from lived experience and far-reaching engagement with different communities, that enables them to build strong, healthy, diverse and sustained relationships that are the prerequisite for a fairer, more culturally sensitive healthcare system.



The youth work curriculum: An exciting opportunity

The development and roll-out of the curriculum presents a significant opportunity for senior leaders in healthcare to further improve the ways in which they envision, plan, coordinate, commission and deliver health services relevant to young people. That process of alignment is already underway. Relationship building, a central tenet of youth work, already features in many healthcare settings. But more needs to be done especially in light of well-documented reports on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on many young people's health and well-being. We believe that the youth work curriculum, which offers the framework within which relationships may be developed most effectively, could be applied in numerous different healthcare settings, including those relating to (but not limited to):

- Victims of violent, sexual or other forms of exploitation
- Young people dealing with the consequences of adverse childhood experience and/or recent traumatic events
- Self-harm, suicide and other risk-related issues
- Young people who experience mental health and/or substance misuse issues
- Youth to adult transitions within the health system
- Long-term health conditions

About the NYA

We are the national standards body and the professional statutory regulatory body for youth work in England. Our mission is to raise awareness of what youth work is, why it is important, the benefits it offers, and how to do youth work well and effectively. This includes offering strategic and practical support to youth work organisations, as well as to those that commission, fund and partner with them. We showcase great youth work practice, work on finding new ways of making youth work ever more effective through research and innovation, and set occupational standards for youth work. We also train and support youth workers, and give advice on youth work to organisations in higher education.

www.nya.org.uk

Published by National Youth Agency
e. nya@nya.org.uk | t. 0116 242 7350

Registration No. 2912597 | Charity No. 1035804
National Youth Agency, 9 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SN

NYA
National Youth Agency