Heathfield, M. and Fusco, D. (eds) *Youth Work and Inequality in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Pages 117-135

7 Youth Work in England
An Uncertain Future?
Helen Jones

England's youth workers have always tended to look back to a golden age when funding was available, when there were apparently fewer restrictive regulations and, presumably, the sun shone on well-resourced programs. The post-war period when government funding was channeled into work with young people via local authorities and third sector or voluntary organizations provides the touchstone for reminiscence. For once, there appear to be firm grounds for nostalgia. Drastically reduced funding for all forms of work with young people provides the context for this chapter. Cuts in funding have served to reinforce and extend inequalities. The UK magazine, *Children and Young People Now*, published an article entitled, 'Youth sector on a "knife-edge" as third of organizations at risk' (N.K., 2013). It presented a depressing overview of reductions in expenditure and a pessimistic prediction of the future. Shortly afterwards, Butler (2013) reported that over a two year period, cuts to youth services averaged 27% and in some places amounted to 50% while a handful axed their entire youth budget. It is clear that youth services have been subject to drastic cuts accompanied by amalgamation with targeted and acute services for young people.

In addition, the very character of England's youth work is under threat. The profession was built on strong values and an ideological foundation. Youth workers worked with young people who were there voluntarily: they might commit to a project but they did so because they chose to. Secondly, youth workers worked with groups of young people. They valued 'association.' Thirdly, youth work was essentially an educational enterprise. Informal education lay at its core. Over the last 20 years, these three values have been corrupted: surveillance has tarnished voluntary engagement, individualization has replaced association and welfarism has begun to take the place of informal education.

This chapter identifies the aspects of young people's lives that have been affected by different financial cuts and other policy changes. To provide examples, current youth work practitioners were asked to write about their experience of the sector. Jo Bambrough and Delia Toberty are experienced workers based in the northwest of England, employed by a local education authority's youth service. The service has undergone radical funding cuts and cultural change as many public services have been dismantled. Matthew Wilson and Gareth White entered the field more recently, working for another local authority and a housing association respectively. Kimberley White, Annette Wilson and Alex Taylor are newly qualified workers based in Yorkshire. They all focused on the dimensions of their work that they feel are most significant to the overall theme of the chapter: how reductions are impacting youth work, youth, and (in)equality. Their words are used as symbolic examples of voices of practice as they adapt to a much-changed environment and a profession struggling to find a new place while surrounded by insecurity. Their input has been juxtaposed with the narrative and highlighted through being italicized. These provide a powerful account, which balances the environment of uncertainty and with underlying vision and determination. Their

writing was spontaneous: they were not interviewed but rather wrote about what matters most to them as practicing youth workers.

> *Statutory work is disappearing across all regions of the UK and is currently being viewed as a luxury. Young people are not a money generator, which makes such provision easier to axe. The illusion is that young people are more tech savvy and will engage with virtual youth work via tablets and iPhones. They don't need real youth workers or dedicated youth centers to go to.*

Clearly youth work is only a part of young people's experience and the devastating reductions to provision are just one element of their experience of public services. Nonetheless it is not difficult to paint an unremittingly gloomy picture of how young people are affected by the current economic situation in England[i]. Perhaps it is not surprising that UNICEF (2007) found the UK's children and young people to be the unhappiest out of those living in 21 developed countries. Aspects contributing to this result included attitudes to education, personal wellbeing, home and family life and general satisfaction with their lives. The OECD (2013) has found that young people are most likely to suffer from governmental austerity packages; they suffer most from cuts. They are also, in political terms, the most powerless.

> *Services for young people are currently facing some very uncertain times. The opportunities that are available to young people through voluntary engagement with youth workers is something we should hold onto dearly. Providing a space for people to engage with a range of opportunities and resources that open up new doors and empower them to make better-informed decisions and a stronger sense of identity within wider surroundings.*

In early 2013, almost 20% of 16-24 year olds were 'NEET', the acronym for young people who are 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' which has evolved into a noun in its own right, with politicians and professionals referring to 'NEETs,' often in disparaging tones. Young people's financial plight has been exacerbated by changes including the removal in 2011 of the Education Maintenance Allowance which had been paid to 16-18 year olds to encourage them to stay in education by providing them with a small weekly grant to help with fares and other overheads. The following year young people opting to attend university found themselves paying vastly increased tuition fees, making higher education an increasingly costly option. Young people who were too young to vote in the 2010 election are paying the price of austerity.

THE 'BIG SOCIETY' PRETENSE

When David Cameron became the UK Prime Minister in 2010, the idea of the 'Big Society' was launched in parallel to the introduction of spending cuts. The electorate was told that massive cuts to public expenditure were vital achieve what was termed 'balancing the books.' However the concept appeared to be a way to shift responsibility for provision, which had hitherto been part of the welfare state onto volunteers. As Liz Such notes, "definition of the Big Society is elusive. It is perhaps best described by what it is not: it is not the State" (Such, 2012, p. 90). For right wing politicians and supporters who favored the idea, the Big Society would revitalize civic society. They envisaged people being excited to take responsibility for the management of facilities and services: volunteers would have the opportunity to staff museums, art galleries, sports centers, libraries and youth clubs. Isolated people would be

brought into their local communities and a new sense of community would be created. Indeed a few people have been excited to take roles in local facilities but for most, as Nicholls (2012) observed, the Big Society is:

> nothing other than a smokescreen for dismantling the public sector and the traditional public sphere of civil society and voluntary organizations and charities. It was an attempt to reintroduce self-help into social concerns and 'philanthro-capitalism', as they called it, instead of social giving. The welfare state is being replaced by a distorted form of self-help (p. 224).

The 'Big Society' needs to be located in its historical context. Across western Europe welfare states were set up as part of post-war reconstruction following the Second World War. From the richest to the poorest, everybody had suffered during the war and there was a sense that rebuilding should benefit all. Britain's welfare state was designed to ensure the end of what the system's architect, William Beveridge, referred to in his famous 1942 report as the 'five giants' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness (Timmins, 1995). The list today might be poverty, poor health, poor education, bad housing and unemployment. People would have a right to state services rather than having to beg for charity: free healthcare, free education, old age pensions, unemployment and other benefits would be paid for through direct taxation and would be a right rather than a privilege. Direct taxation meant that people were paid in relation to their income. Provision would be consistent and fair across the nation. The state was trusted to provide the best for all its citizens. Professions developed to ensure the provision was made during an era of broad consensus, which is often characterized as founded on broadly egalitarian values.

During the 1950s, youth work became an aspect of state provision with paid workers. However it never achieved the status of a statutory requirement; the provision of youth services by local government never became a legal obligation. At the time, some people were optimistic about the introduction of state-run youth work although others saw worrying echoes of youth movements such as Germany's compulsory Hitler Youth and questioned whether paid work with young people should lay within the state's aegis. Subsequently, as youth work never achieved the status of being a statutory requirement, it joined services such as public libraries, sports centers, museums and toilets as an obvious place to make financial cuts.

> *In 2014 youth work is being delivered from a variety of locations including children's centers, libraries and village halls. Work has morphed from a universal provision for all young people to a more streamlined, less responsive service. Delivery has been reduced and buildings have closed. There's an increasing trend moving towards the use of shared buildings in order to cut down core costs...this is a move away from the 'youth center.' As such we are not able to guarantee that we can offer the same level of 'safe space' for young people as they no longer have an environment that is exclusive to them.*

Over the last few years many youth workers have lost their jobs with local authorities, although the situation across England varies considerably. Kerry Jenkins reported that 25% of England's youth services face cuts of between 21% and 30% which is three times higher than the level of cuts faced by other council departments (Jenkins, 2013). Some authorities are consulting residents about priorities. For example, in Kirklees, a local authority area in the north of England, a survey found local residents strongly agreed that its youth services should

provide services for as many young people as possible. 92% favored a focus on early investment which would help to prevent 'problems which may be costly later' such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse (Kirklees Council, 2013). The apparent favor expressed by residents for 'universal' provision contradicts the view often taken by politicians and professionals.

> *Where you live has a massive impact upon your experience as a result of investment local cultures and economic factors. It usually determines what school you go to. The school that you attend may have a very different approach to a neighboring school in terms of curriculum and its response to its duty of care. [Formal agreements] have been initiated by the Youth Council and successfully introduced in [local] schools around sex and relationships education as well as anti-bullying strategies.*

> *You see local authorities only providing what is expected of them rather than being radical and progressive about youth work that [values] the diverse skills and knowledge of its practitioners. Overlooking the talent that is readily available ... leads to people feeling undervalued, underappreciated and disillusioned.*

> *Some staff were 'assimilated' into a new role, often with no induction and no retraining. This clearly impacted on delivery work as staff feel adrift and under pressure until they adjusted to new ways of working. The staffing in our service was reduced by the equivalent of 130 full-time posts... We are currently seeing a higher staff turnover rate and an increasingly introspective workplace culture which feeds competitive working practices rather than a supportive team.*

Various culprits have been identified as responsible for the gradual undermining of the British welfare state before the recent onslaught. During the 1970s and 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party promulgated an ideology which challenged the hitherto-accepted collectivism and began to privatize public services: the welfare state was caricatured as 'the nanny state', knowing what was best for everyone, interfering with personal choice and restricting individual freedom. The welfare state's destruction formed part of Thatcher's legacy and has continued under subsequent governments of all political persuasions. Gradually nineteenth century ideas differentiating between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor were revived. Imogen Tyler sees this as part of the impact of the "arrival of the concept of the underclass in Britain in the 1980s, courtesy of the American political theorist Charles Murray [which] incited public consent for the decomposition of the welfare state" (Tyler, 2013, p. 187). Murray's ideas were promulgated through publication in the national newspaper, *The Sunday Times,* and soon achieved widespread acceptance. New prejudices against certain groups of people developed and inequalities were further entrenched. As unemployment grew in the twenty first century, unemployed young people (disparagingly re-characterized as 'chavs' and subsequently 'neets') were identified increasingly as undeserving. They are seldom in a position to challenge the characterization effectively.

DEFINING 'YOUTH WORK'

Within England's occupational field, there are heated debates about the differences between 'youth work', 'youth and community work' and 'work with young people.' However to the majority of politicians and policy makers, as well as the population at large, these distinctions are bewildering and based on subtle, barely discernable differences. For many practitioners, 'youth work' and 'youth and community work' have a long and proud history (for example,

the YMCA was created in London in 1844 and Scouting in 1907) now supported by degree-level qualifications which are validated for professional purposes by England's National Youth Agency (NYA). On the other hand, 'work with young people' does not require such advanced qualifications and does not attract professional rates of pay. Some people see the occupation 'work with young people' as epitomizing de-professionalization, although others see it as forming part of a range of occupations extending from voluntary work through to graduates in professional grade posts.

> *Youth work is not defined by an activity. Youth work is about empowerment and education. My methods have been youth work methods regardless of the setting.*

> *Youth work should start from where young people are, in relation to their own values, views and principles, as well as their own personal and social space and environment.*

> *[Youth work offers] an open door policy which delivers so much more than many people imagine. It could, through young people accessing provision and engaging with peers with such diverse experiences and perspectives. Unlike school and more formal structures, people are not thrown together and expected to perform in a particular way, rather they are welcomed and allowed to be. In a harsher society this can be the only positive and affirming experience some people have.*

> *Fundamentally the relationship between a young person and youth worker should be one of co-production.*

As indicated earlier, England's approach to traditional youth work is grounded in a strongly articulated value base with three particular key aspects: voluntary engagement, informal education and the importance of association. Anti-discriminatory practice is its powerful foundation. Originally founded in 1904, the charity The Youth Association explains in its 2014-16 Strategy, "Our work is always most effective when it is voluntary: its power to grow mutual respect between young people and adults comes from the rights of both to walk away from the process. It must be a positive choice".

> *I feel strongly that youth work is based on the voluntary attendance of young people and should be need and want led, with those needs and wants decided upon by the young people. To impose activities on them at a time when they do not want or need them is counterproductive.*

Youth workers are proud of accepting and respecting young people on their own terms and in their own chosen context: in the past young people's names were not necessarily gathered and other data were often scant. This meant it was often difficult to provide the sort of evidence sought by managers, councilors and public bodies. In 2011 Members of Parliament set out to understand youth work's impact: "what government gets for its investment in youth work, and what evidence there is for any positive impact from that investment" (Thomas, 2011, p. 18). The politicians struggled to find 'objective evidence' (House of Commons, 2011a: Para.30) although they had been provided with an 'extensive and comprehensive' range of documentation by the youth workers' trades union (Nicholls, 2012, p. 41).

Nicholls posits a radical vision of youth work as an 'elaborate and sensitive' transformative practice which is 'uniquely placed to advance young people and their issues' (Nicholls, 2012,

p. 40). Anodyne 'work with young people' does not share youth work's profoundly empowering intent. Coburn and Wallace (2011) believe that youth work offers "the best possibilities for social change and emancipatory practice" (p. 86). They propose that youth work is a "synthesis of personal development and social education" (ibid). As such, it is a radical activity that questions policy and challenges conformity. This radical dimension can place youth work in an uneasy position with authority.

> *We work towards positive change with young people and this must be at the center of all our work. To successfully combine the individual needs of people with the conflicting organizational behaviors, ensuring not to pathologize the behaviors of young people. Even if the change is small and gradual it can have a significant impact on combatting injustice.*

> *I have been able to use my skills as an informal educator to break down and analyze subject matters and present them in ways that have been relevant to young people… I have managed to achieve this by working not 'on' the young person but working 'with' them … in an attempt to empower and help them to develop a conscious awareness of their situation.*

Youth workers were once found mainly in youth clubs and community centers. They might work within their clubs and centers or on a detached basis: working with young people on street-corners and in parks. Nowadays they are more widely employed and may be found in a wide range of agencies. With skills in engaging successfully with young people who are sometimes characterized as 'hard to reach,' youth workers are employed by an increasingly wide range of organizations and institutions involved in education (both schools and colleges predominantly serving young people aged 16-19), housing, youth justice and health. In many of these contexts, they might work with individuals rather than groups. There is debate as to whether this constitutes pathologizing young people or utilizing youth workers' skills effectively.

> *The recognition that we cannot change the structures of society but that we can change how people interact and respond to the structures is vital: to allow people to develop the skills and resilience to advocate on their own behalf and on behalf of others.*

Based on practice in Scotland, Coburn and Wallace (2011) posit a typology of models of practice for youth work within schools and identified seven variants. These include the delivery of alternative curricula, usually to young people at risk of permanent exclusion, supplementing the core curriculum with programs such as anti-bullying or 'lads as dads' and 'a complementary model' where youth workers provide input which is "linked to the smooth running of school, e.g. anger management programmes" (p. 49). This picture also applies in England. Courses in anger management and work with very young fathers are types of work undertaken by youth workers.

> *I have found myself advocating on behalf of young people on a regular basis when I feel the young person's voice is not being heard. I have used this one-to-one, professional method of advocacy as a tool to 'respect and promote the young people's rights to make their own decisions and choices' (citing 2001 NYA guidelines).*

YOUNG PEOPLE AND TRANSITIONS

In England the definition of youth has not remained consistent but is currently seen as aged 13-19 years old. The upper age is raised to 22 or 25 for work with young people with disabilities although the support may be limited to young people remaining in full-time education. Many youth workers identify the age range 11-13 as a missed opportunity which should be regarded as a priority. Some services are considering further integration which might involve shifting the focus to 'work with families.'

> *The latest rumblings are that the service will work with young people from the age of 12 who have been identified as needing support. An early support service for young people, options are being considered around which agencies can be 'aligned' in this work... we're looking at being a key part of the 0-19 service for young people... This may mean merging with services we wouldn't ordinarily as youth workers align ourselves with.*

> *There has been significant change within children and young people's services, which has seen the youth service becoming part of the bigger integrated youth support service ... I have recognised a change in people. Workers are now being considered about their work and how much they are prepared to share.*

England's school leaving age is 16 but from September 2013, young people have had to spend another year participating in some form of education, training or full-time employment (over 20 hours per week) alongside part-time education or training. The age rises to 18 in 2015. It seems that the raising of the compulsory 'participation age' and consequent postponement of a key youth transition has been accepted with apparently few challenges from young people themselves.

The decision to raise the age of participation in education was taken by the Labour government in 2007 and the policy was not changed when the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition government was created soon after the 2010 election. The thinking behind the decision was presented as being in young people's best interests: most young people decided to remain in education of their own volition but those who leave tended to be those who were 'more vulnerable and lower-achieving.' The government considered them to be the exact group which most needed to stay in education so they can achieve useful skills which will prepare them for life. Indeed, "the time has come to consider whether society is letting these young people down by allowing them to leave education and training for good at 16, knowing they are not adequately prepared for life" (DfES, 2007, p. 1) Politicians appeared to agree on the wisdom of the decision. The fact that there would be an obvious impact on the number of NEET young people was not widely discussed although the reduction is likely to be presented as a positive achievement. A few critics pointed out that some young people, whose previous experience of education had not been positive, might not be well served by another year following immediately on school. Some suggested that alternatives might include the opportunity to spend some time entirely away from educational institutions before returning to learning, but this has never formed part of politicians' plans.

Britain's national newspaper *The Independent* estimated that around 52,000 extra young people would be impacted by the changes (Garner, 2013c). After several months of this policy, it remains unclear how the system is to be policed. For example, what penalties will be implemented when young people have not succeeded in finding employment, training or a place in education? At what point will this be ascertained? What action will be taken against

young people who 'disappear'? The government believed that sanctions would not be required as young people 'have the opportunity to access the learning opportunity they want' (Garner, 2013b) and it was unclear whether the rules affecting school truancy would be employed. In addition, if a young person is working for an employer that then closes down, how will this be identified? For these reasons, Garner described the generation as 'guinea-pigs' (Garner, 2013b).

The day before the autumn term began in most of England's schools and colleges in 2013, the government announced an additional change: any young person who had not achieved a grade 'C' in the mathematics and/or English examinations taken the previous June would be required to continue to study the subjects (Garner, 2013c). How schools and colleges were going to re-timetable where necessary and recruit additional staff if required was not made clear. The emphasis on achieving grade 'C' in examinations which are graded A-G has to be set against the government's stated aim to end perceived grade inflation. Are young people being set up to fail?

Alongside increasing the age of participation, the government shifted responsibility for providing careers guidance to schools themselves. It appears that the quantity and quality of provision have decreased greatly. The Labour government (1997-2010) had set up the Connexions service to provide advice and guidance to individual young people on issues including careers. By the time of its abolition it had gained widespread recognition: young people were aware of the service. Without the careers guidance workers employed by Connexions, many young people receive scant advice on future courses or careers. It has been suggested schools with sixth forms (years 12 and 13) tend to promote their own courses, which might not necessarily be in young people's best interests (Russell, 2013). Thus the situation for young people combines the legal rise in participation age, which defers a key transition to adulthood but a shortage of professional guidance in taking vital career decisions. Youth workers increasingly are being tasked with fostering young people's development in the context of employment and education. This serves to undermine the traditional youth work relationship between workers and young people and forms part of the increased targeting of work with particular individuals.

> *We are measured on […]:*
> * *Recorded outcomes (a form to show a set target and progress for a young person)*
> * *Accreditations (certificated learning that can help with employment and future learning)*
> * *Intended destinations (what a young person aims to do when they leave compulsory education)*
> * *NEET figures*
> *You can clearly see that we're to provide an extensive service with a clear focus on young people's engagement and transitions in relation to the labour market.*

SHIFTING INEQUALITIES

It is iniquitous to seek to construct a hierarchy of inequality or disadvantage but there are documented groups and issues which merit particular concern. There have been shifts in the narrative of disadvantage. Cuts in public spending, the economic decline and rise in unemployment have had a devastating impact on services for virtually all young people except for the most affluent who are less likely to use public services. Some cuts have eroded programs that were overtly intended to address inequality. For example, Aim Higher was a

scheme under the Labour government and ran from 2004-11. It aimed to encourage university applications from young people from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds. Short courses, day schools and visits were funded but the program was scrapped soon after the 2010 election.

> *Concepts such as values and social impact are very rarely spoken of within the work environment and certainly not with … urgency, formality or frequency.*
>
> *As funding becomes harder to obtain … people chase funding streams that offer money for particular pieces of targeted work and the delivery of this work will be at the expense of work that is actually wanted and needed by young people. I hope that this is not a trend that becomes more established and that the actual purpose of youth work, to deliver work that is truly needs led and voluntarily taken part in, is not overlooked in the chase for funding.*
>
> *Our poverty campaign is running in an area of high socio-economic deprivation, initiated by a small group of young women who came across statistics in the local press showing the high numbers of children and young people in their ward who are growing up below the poverty line. They have met with local food banks, run a food drive, put together curriculum resources and are learning currently how to make a film to make this more high profile.*

Nowadays tiny voluntary initiatives provide models of good practice but can only meet a fraction of the unaddressed need. For example, two young women school teachers Becca Dean and Charly Young, set up the Girls' Network to mentor girls aged 14-19. Their participants include the daughters of asylum seekers and refugees but their initiative is tiny in comparison with the Aim Higher, which was a national scheme (Murray, 2013). Girls' Network appears to reflect core youth work values yet was set up by teachers, working as volunteers.

> *Now more than ever, I feel disempowered in my position to really address the key issues and barriers facing young people. Working for a service that is not nearly sufficiently flexible and integrated as is necessary to meet the needs with which we are presented. Provision is very functional and outcome-driven and at present doesn't come with much security due to current government agendas and austerity measures.*

Gendered disadvantage cannot be examined without considering additional aspects such as race, culture, class, sexuality and disability. For example, at a time when young women school students are achieving measurably better than young men in public examinations, the examinations are being changed (BBC, 2013). Research has shown that irrespective of class, culture or disability, young women thrive when ongoing coursework grades are included as an element in final examination grades while many young men prefer cramming for 'sudden death' exams at the end of the year. The government has decided to shift away from coursework (which arguably reflects the skills of drafting and redrafting which are required in the world outside school) towards final exams (which demonstrate the skill of memorizing material that is generally not retained thereafter). From 2014 girls will be systemically disadvantaged in public examinations, returning to the situation in which education has been designed and redesigned to advantage boys. Michèle Cohen has traced the history of boys' comparative underachievement and the shifts in narrative explaining why girls' demonstration of apparent achievement should not be linked with intelligence. Girls' superior

performance was written off as superficial and ways of measuring success have been reconsidered over several hundred years (Cohen, 1998, p. 21). The changes to public examinations cannot be explained by austerity but rather echo current political ideological attitudes to education. The successes achieved by feminists during the 1970s are being eroded.

Meanwhile politicians are expressing concerns about young men's educational outcomes. In particular, working class young white men are increasingly established as a disadvantaged, unequal group that has been to some extent marginal to the rhetoric of equality. Far more boys than girls are excluded from school and end up in Pupil Referral Units where formal examinations might not be offered. David Jackson outlines how girls' underachievement was identified in the 1970s. Causes were analyzed and initiatives introduced but changes that addressed girls' needs appear to have disadvantaged boys and twenty years later the focus shifted to boys' disadvantage and educational failure (Jackson, 1998). A further fifteen years had passed before government minister David Willetts observed, "I do worry about what looks like increasing underperformance by young men" (cited in Garner, 2013a). In response, Joan Smith wrote,

> Teenage boys from poor families tend not to value education, and their schools don't have the resources to challenge so many connected problems. They also have competing models of masculinity, linked to sexual performance, conspicuous consumption and violence. Ofsted (the government's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) has identified the problem succinctly as the lure of the three Fs: fighting, football and fucking (Smith, 2013).

Increasingly researchers and authors have examined the situation but there are scant examples of effective projects addressing the situation. Furthermore disadvantaged young straight white working class men are the group most likely to be attracted to far right wing often-violent racist movements such as the English Defence League.

Hanbury, Lee and Batsleer (2010) see gender stereotyping as underpinning the attention given by government. Young men, "are seen as anti-social, involved in gun and knife crime … [they] misuse drugs and alcohol" whilst young women "need protection and [are] at risk of self-harm and pregnancy" (Hanbury, Lee and Batsleer, 2010, p. 117). Money focused on emancipatory gender-based youth work with young women has largely been abandoned and emancipatory work with young men never started in the first place. Many youth workers reflect the reluctance of the wider general public to characterize themselves as feminists. Nonetheless some women are seeking to re-invent feminist work with young women and rediscover gender-based radicalism. Janet Batsleer celebrates the work undertaken in England's northwest by the Feminist Webs initiative. She shows how its new wave of activism dates back to a 2005 initiative, Done Hair and Nails: Now What? (Batsleer, 2013). However, in many areas a limited agenda underpins much work with young women: sexual health and pregnancy, food and healthy eating, hair, nails and beauty have eclipsed the adventurous work which opened up new opportunities and experiences. There is scant provision offering activities such as canoeing, rock climbing and other outdoor pursuits.

More positively, social media has opened up new potential for young people to campaign and make a powerful impact themselves. Ror example in February 2014, 17-year-old Fahma Mohamed spearheaded the fight against female genital mutilation. Her online petition secured 250,000 signatures in a fortnight and gained national recognition. Fahma and her

friends met with the Secretary of State for Education and succeeded in their campaign to ensure information is sent to all schools before the summer holidays and to remind teachers of their responsibility to protect their pupils (Topping, 2014). Their work garnered widespread accolade including from UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon.

Little has changed in the three decades since I wrote an essay as part of my professional youth work qualification asking what anti-sexist work was being undertaken with boys and young men in single gender groups as a counterpart to feminist work with young women. In 1983 I found virtually none. Yet, the White Ribbon Campaign (the UK branch of the global movement) is developing exciting work across the country. Men campaigning against male physical and emotional violence are working with groups of young men in a wide range of different contexts including schools, youth clubs and universities with informal education as a central method. They cite research showing that one in five young men believe that women 'often provoke violence' (whiteribboncampaign, 2014). In many places this initiative is true to youth work's values: young men participate voluntarily, they work in groups, and education lies at the core.

While White Ribbon focuses on men as potential perpetrators, workers also focus on victims. Bullying is an issue for many young people and in particular those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual, a situation noted by campaigning organization Stonewall (2013). Stonewall's 2007 research, *The School Report*, showed that "homophobic bullying is almost endemic in Britain's schools" (p.2) and their 2009 publication *The Teachers' Report* found that, "primary and secondary school staff confirmed that homophobic bullying is the most frequent form of bullying after bullying because of weight" (Stonewall, 2009, p.3). Yet in the population as a whole, as Pew Research Center found, "the view that homosexuality should be accepted by society is prevalent in most of the European Union countries surveyed" with about three-quarters or more in Britain (76%) sharing this view.

Youth workers in many cities and towns are involved in dedicated groups to offer opportunities for LGBTQ young people to meet in a safe environment. For example, Sheffield Fruitbowl runs a weekly group for school-age young people in the city center, staffed by qualified youth workers. The group was set up in 2003 by Sheffield's Centre for HIV and Sexual Health in recognition of the fact that groups for LGB young people tend to span a very wide age range yet 13 year olds may have little in common with 21 year olds. On their website, Fruitbowl say, "if you are exploring your sexuality or gender identity and want to chat to somebody about it, then Fruitbowl is a good place to contact. The youth workers are all trained and have lots of experience of working with LGBT young people so probably have a good understanding of what you are going through" (Sheffield Fruitbowl, 2010).

LOOKING AHEAD

At the time of writing, individual programs undertaking innovative and exciting work with young people are so few and far between as to be entirely atypical. In a country which appears to have accepted the rhetoric of austerity as grounded in common-sense, hegemonic logic, voices raised against the language of ever-more drastic cuts to public expenditure are barely audible in the wider public sphere. For example in May 2014 the Twitter-feed from the passionately anti-cut ChooseYouth coalition boasted fewer than 2000 followers. Nicholls is sure that local authority youth services constitute the first public service to be 'destroyed.' He argues that the reason for this is that the youth service "is the only public service built and sustained by young people themselves in a real 'big society' partnership and a service

designed to give young people a voice and to develop critical thinking and collective action for change" (Nicholls, 2013). Thus, of course, it constitutes a potentially articulate and subversive force. What Thomas could refer to charitably as 'long-term under investment' in 2011 (Thomas, 2011, p. 28) has transmogrified into savage cuts and, in places, total obliteration.

In some towns and cities, faith-based youth work has stepped forward as the sole provider of youth work following the removal of provision by local authorities. Many Christian churches are prepared to work with any young people who come forward but others see their role as essentially working with young people of faith or potential faith: they are primarily missionary in nature. Many insist on employing only workers who profess their Christian faith. This presents a barrier for some workers and many young people. Similarly some synagogues work with any young people whilst others restrict provision to people of Jewish faith. Islam and Sikhism are also developing their youth work dimension.

> *I always had a strong sense of social justice, something that I associate with the overtly religious upbringing I had. My family were far from perfect [but] they had their ideals.*

One group of workers is brave enough to work outside the state structure because of their profound belief in the value of youth work grounded in voluntary engagement, association and informal education. London's Voice of Youth (VoY) was set up as a workers' co-operative with a strongly egalitarian approach to its work with young people aged 8-19. Workers are 'a mixture of new and experienced Youth Workers ranging from different backgrounds and experience' and they 'make decisions together … try to work as equals … do not have bosses or managers, and … all paid the same rate.' (VoY, 2014). Sadly VoY seems to be unique: comparable initiatives have not been found in other cities.

Some new jobs have been created within schools and other mainstream organizations because youth workers are often skilled at working with young people who are hostile to other professionals. A small number of new opportunities for youth work practice have emerged within different structures. For example, housing associations offer rental homes to people on low incomes and are responsible for some entire social housing estates (projects). Their tenants might find the very existence of groups of young people scary or intimidating. Youth workers, often working away from buildings on a detached basis, are able to build relationships with young people and, in some cases, to bring young people and older people together in inter-generational programs. Consequently some housing associations have identified youth workers as the people best placed to engage with young people whose presence on the streets is seen as problematic by residents. However they have not grown to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of state resources.

> *I recognized at an early stage [with the housing association] that I had the capacity to have a huge influence on the young people I was working with. Recognizing this ability helped me realize that I was a role model for young people.*

> *There are many professionals desperately trying to improve outcomes for young people and while I still see significant benefits to the work we deliver, there is a vast untapped potential that the current climate simply isn't offering.*

In London, two hospitals have responded to the proliferation of gang-based knife crime by employing youth workers in Accident and Emergency Services. Youth workers focus on any young people who visit regularly due to being repeatedly assaulted or otherwise involved in violence. They offer follow-up support, advice and counseling around issues such as anger management and also seek to make contact with young women who may be exploited by gangs. The Centre for Social Justice recommends youth workers being employed more widely in hospital settings (CSJ, 2014). This work is a new and exciting development: whether it is extended to other cities remains to be seen. It is also depressing because it deals with the result rather than the cause: if youth workers were employed in sufficient numbers to run youth clubs or work on the streets, there might be a far lower level of gang-related violence.

The government has redirected funding from youth work into the National Citizens' Service (NCS), which provides a 3-week, full-time experience for 15-17 year olds in England and Northern Ireland. Youth workers are involved in some of the most successful delivery agencies, measured by participant satisfaction, retention and other measures. Young people typically stay for one week at an outdoor pursuits center then deliver a social action program whilst living away from home in student accommodation. The social action program was intended to contribute to the erstwhile Big Society. However its impact is probably greater on participants, who develop transferable skills including leadership and independence, than on local communities. NCS caters for around 90 000 participants each year but in England alone there are over 640 000 16 year olds (ONS, 2013): under 14% of young people participate in NCS. Many youth workers are skeptical about the scheme, often on the grounds that money has been taken from long-term universal work and channeled into short programs but young people who have participated are often very positive.

Numerous commentators and pundits have written in excoriating terms about politicians' approach to the economic management of Britain and its impact on young people. In 2010 Patrick Butler predicted that the combined cuts to services and provision for young people would have a 'multiple impact' on their lives. He quoted Dara Farrell, aged 17, a member of the UK Youth Parliament[ii] who said that "working-class young people will be affected … more than any other group. Politicians say 'we are all in this together', but young people are in it more than anybody else" (Butler, 2010). Also in 2010 an editorial in *The Observer* described cuts as 'a giant experiment using Britain as the laboratory and some of its poorest citizens as guinea pigs' (Observer, 2010). After cuts had begun to affect people in practice, Will Hutton (2013) wrote that, "A society that neglects its young on this scale, and puts such pressure on them is one that has lost its way" (Hutton, 2013). The more politically aware predict riots, which in the past have often preceded an increase to funding for work with young people. Others have suggested that the perceived combination of capitalism and fatalism found in the majority of young people render overtly politically inspired riots unlikely.

The universalism aspect of state-provided youth provision is being eroded by the destruction of the youth service. In some cities there is now no discernable youth service although others remain comparatively buoyant. Different priorities in neighboring local authority areas have resulted in a fragmented picture across England. As noted earlier, the O.E.C.D. (2013) report showed that people who were already disadvantaged are being affected disproportionately by cuts to public spending: young people are easily marginalized by politicians. It is impossible to generalize about the state of youth work since the government has delegated the responsibility of making cuts to local areas: it is not feasible to state the extent to which

young people are affected on a national basis. More optimistically, youth workers' skills are sought by a widening range of organizations. In conclusion, the 'uncertain future' of youth work is spread inconsistently across the profession and across the nation with hope rearing its head in some places.

REFERENCES

Batsleer, J. (2013). *Youth working with girls and women in community settings.* Farnham: Ashgate.

BBC. (2013). *GCSEs: Gove pledges 'challenging' exam changes.* Retrieved from www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22841266

Butler, P. (2010). Teenagers could be among worst hit by spending cuts warn charities. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/oct/21/teenagers-spending-cuts-warning

Butler, P. (2013). If only cuts to youth services were fantasy. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/apr/30/cuts-youth-services-fantasy

CSJ. (2014). *Girls and gangs*. London: Centre for Social Justice.

Cohen, M. (1998). A habit of healthy idleness: boys' underachievement in historical perspective. In D. Epstein, J. Elwood, V. Hey, and J. Maw (Eds.), *Failing Boys?* (pp. 19-34). Buckingham: Open University Press.

DfES. (2007). *Raising expectations: Staying in education and training post-16*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Garner, R. (2013a). Exclusive: Treat white working-class boys like ethnic minority, Willetts tell universities. *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/exclusive-treat-white-workingclass-boys-like-ethnic-minority-willetts-tells-universities-8436087.html

Garner, R. (2013b). School's not out: fears for teenage 'guinea pigs' forced to stay in education. *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/schools-not-out-fears-for-teenage-guinea-pigs-forced-to-stay-in-education-8760016.html

Garner, R. (2013c). Pupils who 'fail' GCSE English or maths will be forced to stay on at school and resit their exams. *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/pupils-who-fail-gcse-english-or-maths-will-be-forced-to-stay-on-at-school-and-resit-their-exams-8793614.html

Hanbury, A., Lee, A. and Batsleer, J. (2010). Youth work with girls: a feminist perspective. In J. Batsleer and B. Davies (Eds.), *What is youth work?* (pp. 116-128). Exeter: Learning Matters.

House of Commons Education Committee. (2011). *Services for young people: 3rd report of session 2010-11*. London: Stationery Office.

Hutton, W. (2013). Blame austerity, not old people, for the plight of Britain's young. *The Observer*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/23/blame-austerity-old-plight-young-hutton

Jackson, D. (1998). Breaking out of the binary trap. In D. Epstein, J. Elwood, V. Hey, and J. Maw, (Eds.), *Failing boys?* (pp. 77-95). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Jenkins, K. (2013). Youth services are being savaged by government cuts. *False Economy*. Retrieved from http://www.falseeconomy.org.uk/blog/youth-services-in-crisis

Kirklees Council. (2013). Feedback note —e-panel survey Spring 2013. Retrieved from http://www2.kirklees.gov.uk/involve/publisheddoc.aspx?ref=i10na5li&e=402

Murray, J. (2013). Watching girls develop in confidence is amazing. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/02/girls-mentoring-networking

Nicholls, D. (2012). *For youth workers and youth work*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Nicholls, D. (2013). Manifesto for a new youth service. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/may/02/manifesto-youth-service

N.K. (2013). Youth sector on a "knife-edge" as third of organizations at risk'. *Children and Young People Now*. 16 April.

N.Y.A. (2001). *Ethical conduct in youth work*. Leicester: National Youth Agency.

O.E.C.D. (2013). Crisis squeezes income and puts pressure on inequality and poverty. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/social/inequality.htm

ONS. (2013). Age by Single Year 2011. *Neighbourhood Statistics.* Retrieved from www.neighbourhoodstatistics.gov.uk

Pew Research Center. (2013). The global divide on homosexuality. Retrieved from http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality

Russell, V. (2013). MPs unhappy with switch of careers guidance to schools. *Public Finance*. Retrieved from www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2013/01/mps-unhappy-with-switch-of-careers-guidance-to-schools

Sheffield Fruitbowl. (2010). *All about us*. Retrieved from http://www.sheffieldfruitbowl.org.uk

Smith, J. (2013). The government has gone to great lengths to restrict access to university. Where was Willetts's concern for the disadvantaged then? *The Independent*. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/the-government-has-gone-to-great-lengths-to-restrict-access-to-university-where-was-willettss-concern-for-the-disadvantaged-then-8437166.html

Stonewall. (2013). *Homophobic bullying*. Retrieved from www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/education_for_all/youth_workers/4168.asp

Stonewall. (2007). *The School Report.* London: Stonewall.

Stonewall. (2009). *The Teachers' Report.* London: Stonewall.

Such, L. (2012). Little leisure in the Big Society. *Leisure Studies, 32(1)*, 89-107.

Thomas, P. (2011). Proving our worth? Youth work, 'race' and evidence.' *Youth and Policy, 107*, 18-33.

Timmins, N. (1995). *The five giants – A biography of the welfare state*. London: Fontana Press.

Topping, A. (2014). Michael Gove agrees to write to schools over female genital mutilation. *The Guardian*. 25 February 2014.

Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting subjects*. London: Zed Books.

UNICEF (2007). *EFA global monitoring report: Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education*. Paris: U.N.E.S.C.O. Publishing.

Whiteribboncampaign. (2014). *Educate young people*. Retrieved from http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

VoY. (2014). *Our approach*. Retrieved from http://voice-of-youth.org

---

[i] England, together with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is known as the United Kingdom. Scotland's education system, including its youth work, developed entirely separately. Wales and Northern Ireland have developed separate training requirements and structures recently. This chapter concerns England.

[ii] The UK Youth Parliament provides the opportunity for young people (11-18 yrs), who have been elected by their peers, to discuss social topics and gain experience of debating and democracy.