

## **‘Counting young people is not youth work’: The tensions between values, targets and positive activities in neighbourhood-based work**

### **Abstract**

The UK New Labour government’s ideological preoccupations included tackling deprivation, addressing anti-social behaviour and persuading young people to engage in ‘positive activities’. In 2007, the report ‘Aiming High for Young People’ (DCDF 2007) outlined policies intended to contribute to the achievement of associated goals. The Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) provided Civil Sector Organisations (CSOs) with the means to put the policies into practice and also aimed to build organisational capacity. Using data gathered for the evaluation of one organisation’s YSDF-financed programme of detached work on housing estates in Yorkshire, this article explores some of the tensions between the traditional youth work values of voluntary engagement, informal education and association and the demand for quick results linked to a particular short-term funding stream. The potential for longer term impacts was undermined as YSDF’s approach to ensuring sustainability focussed on funding diversification rather than embedding the work in local communities. The article concludes that ongoing input rather than a short injection of funding is needed to generate effective long-term impacts on communities.

Key Words: youth work; ‘positive activities’, values, targets

## **‘Counting young people is not youth work’: The tensions between values, targets and positive activities in neighbourhood-based work**

### **Introduction**

Encouraging young people to make positive use of their spare time was a concern for the UK’s New Labour government (1997-2010). Their wide-ranging social policies were founded on ideological preoccupations which included tackling deprivation, addressing anti-social behaviour and persuading young people to engage in ‘positive activities’ rather than taking part in anti-social pursuits. This article focuses on the outcomes of this policy through the case study of a state-funded programme of youth work delivered by a civil sector organisation (CSO), The Youth Association (TYA), from 2009-11. It examines the impact of the programme both on the young people and on the organisation and concludes by considering some of the wider consequences.

New Labour wanted young people to be persuaded to participate in activities designed to contribute to their future success in life. With this in mind, in 2007 England’s Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published ‘Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities’. This was the final document in the Policy Review of Children and Young People which had addressed formal education and the youth service already. ‘Aiming High’ outlined a strategy to transform ‘leisure-time opportunities, activities and support services’. It was informed by three ‘core principles’: ‘progressive universalism’, ‘prevention’ and ‘an emphasis on rights and responsibilities’ (DCSF 2007, p.15). ‘Progressive universalism’ meant that provision should be intended for all young people but favouring the more

disadvantaged or those whose behaviour was considered to warrant modification. 'Prevention' involved engaging with young people before they got 'into difficulties' and finally, 'responsibilities' meant that as well as having a 'right' to 'excellent quality provision', young people, parents and communities had a responsibility to 'get involved in addressing the issues faced by young people and help improve what is on offer' (ibid). Young people were to be encouraged to participate in activities designed to contribute to their future success in life. Created soon afterwards, the 3-year Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) provided CSOs with the financial means to put the policies into practice and also aimed to build their long-term organisational capacity.

The Youth Association a long-established CSO based in Wakefield, West Yorkshire secured YSDF funding and this article draws on data collected for the evaluation of its programme. TYA's successful bid, worth over half a million pounds, was intended primarily to finance detached youth work in four local authority areas in South and West Yorkshire. As required, the bid included details of the programme's 'objectives, impact and outcomes' and also outlined 'sustainability and development needs' which centred on income diversification. In order to achieve these goals, TYA intended to remain faithful to its own formal statement of the 'Principles of Good Youth Work'. Devised by young people, staff and the executive committee, it asserts, 'Good youth work is primarily a social and group process' (TYA 2010, p.16); a 'traditional' approach grounded in 'association' and groupwork.

The organisation identifies voluntary engagement as central to its work and also states,

Children and young people set the agenda for good youth workers. This does not mean that a government agenda to promote learning, achievement and

employment for young people has no part to play in good youth work. These are exactly the needs that many young people express. That said, children and young people as individuals will always have their own specific needs that do not necessarily fit with government policy or agenda (TYA 2010, p.16).

Despite the potential tensions involved in balancing their stated principles with government agendas, TYA's YSDF bid sought to use 'good youth work' to meet ambitious targets; marrying process and product.

### ***Aiming High for Young People***

'Aiming High for Young People' saw young people's use of their leisure time as providing scope not only for fun and relaxation but also for informal learning and engagement in 'positive activities'. New Labour's interest in leisure activities was based on research which suggested that 'participation in constructive leisure-time activities, particularly those that are sustained through the teenage years, can have a significant impact on young people's resilience and outcomes in later life' (DCSF 2007, p.6). The research showed the significance of continuity in provision but paradoxically YSDF provided funding of a temporary, short-term nature. However a capacity building component was included: ongoing provision was to be ensured through developing skills in CSOs to enable them to increase their success rate in securing future sources of income through diversification.

DCSF defined 'Positive activities' as 'sport, the arts, environmental projects, uniformed activities, volunteering and centre-based and detached work' (DCSF 2007, p.21), a list echoing the programmes available to members of long-established

voluntary organisations. Emphasis was put on the importance of 'structure' in the activities' design; of ensuring they were purposeful. 'Aiming High' pointed out,

Organised activities are a common feature of the lives of more affluent young people. But for those from less affluent homes, a lack of the same opportunities reinforces the disadvantages they already face as a result of their parents' lower levels of education and lack of influential networks (DCSF 2007, p.18).

The value of continuity, consistency and constancy in provision was noted:

'Successful activities... encourage sustained participation and retain young people as they mature' (DCSF 2007, p.24). This was to be complemented by the long-term retention of skilled and creative workers and volunteers with high expectations and the capacity to build lasting relationships. It is possible to critique the role of 'affluence' in participation and the word's class connotations: it is reasonable to suggest it could be regarded as a synonym for 'middle class'. Young people were encouraged to see their choice of leisure activity as potentially significant for example when completing applications for jobs or further studies. The theory of cultural capital was significant although not overtly named as was Putnam's concept of 'bridging social capital' (2000, p.22).

'Aiming High' identified a governmental role in the organisation of young people's spare time which arguably removed possible long term continuity and constancy of provision through its grounding in the value base of a particular party political ideology. 'Aiming High' enshrined the ideological preoccupations of the Labour government although it was couched in the apparently common-sense terms characteristic of hegemonic narrative: many points were ones with which few people would disagree. For example, many people would agree that young people benefit

from coming into contact with people from different generations and from different ethnicities and faith groups. However questions arise over whether this should be fostered as an aspect of the government's policy of 'community cohesion' or whether it should be a matter of happenstance. 'Aiming High' favoured the former view and activities were not only intended to benefit the young participants but also the wider community. It was believed that anti-social behaviour would be decreased if young people had 'something positive to do' and adults would have the opportunity to see young people 'making a positive contribution to society' (DCSF 2007, p.19). The importance of involving parents as well as young people in the design and delivery of activities was noted since, as the authors of 'Aiming High' argued, 'successful programmes recognise the continuing influence of parents on their teenage sons and daughters, especially when it comes to encouraging them to take part in positive activities' (DCSF 2007, p.23). However as YSDF neither financed nor supported the active recruitment of parents or wider communities, it was arguably a programme with a central flaw.

In 2009 under the banner 'Positive Activities for Young People', DCSF and the National Youth Agency (NYA) published 'Expanding Friday and Saturday Night Provision'. Local authorities were required to re-organise work with young people and ensure provision at weekends, which had been usual in earlier generations but was no longer routine. Whilst supposedly seeking to provide attractive activities for young people, it was grounded primarily in 'concerns about young people's behaviour on weekend evenings, particularly with regard to alcohol use' (DCSF 2009, p.1). The report added, 'Engaging young people in Friday and Saturday night activities is an important part of the drive to reduce anti-social and risky behaviour among young

people including their involvement in crime, youth nuisance and drug use' (DCSF 2009, p.22). However in February 2010 'Children and Young People Now' published an article headlined 'Young People lukewarm about weekend opening' (Watson 2010). The article suggested that young people preferred midweek youth club sessions with Wednesdays as the most popular option. Meanwhile new levels of social control and surveillance were introduced at weekends and funding was redirected from midweek youth work as interventions targeted young people at the behest of councillors and police (Boyd 2011).

### ***The Youth Sector Development Fund and The Youth Association***

The YSDF was designed to provide funding for approaches outlined in 'Aiming High' and to provide essentially diversionary activities on Friday and Saturday nights. It was also concerned with building CSOs' longer term capacity and sustainability: three policy strands woven together. Organisations which had track records of successfully delivering services to the most disadvantaged young people were provided with business support alongside the grant funding. As noted, the Youth Association's successful tender under YSDF's third round secured funding for two-year youth work programmes in four areas in Yorkshire using detached work methods. Detached work involves practitioners meeting with young people where they choose to gather in public spaces such as street corners and parks and generally does not seek to relocate them (see, for example, Tiffany (2007)). TYA's tender sought to bridge the gap between traditional youth work grounded in voluntary engagement, association and informal education and the government's preference for 'positive activities' delivered to specified target groups and numbers. The ideologically-driven funding was to be used to provide traditional youth work for the young people who came of their own

volition: a potential tension. Indeed Pinnock et al (2009, p.57) suggest that this 'self-referral' is a risky strategy which they feel poses 'an inevitable barrier' when organisations tender for commissions due to the less predictable nature of the number of participants. In this case TYA's bid was successful, possibly as their targets were derived from their previous detached work programmes in both town centres and residential areas. Nonetheless the figures suggested were ambitious.

TYA indicated that during the first year of operation, applications would be made for funding to provide continuity for the work in the original two locations. Thus, at the start of the second year, workers would be able to move into two additional areas, leaving the first areas supported from newly secured, preferably long-term, funding streams. In line with government policy, work with young people was to be scheduled particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. Rates of youth crime and anti-social behaviour in the areas identified had been found to be measurably higher on weekend nights. Optimistic targets were set for programmes of work such as sports, arts and film projects. Some of these involved going away for organised weekend residential. A particular innovation concerned equipping workers with digital devices on which every encounter with each young person could be recorded, including information such as age and gender and also whether the young people were involved in substance abuse, crime or anti-social behaviour. Thus TYA was in a position to collect extensive quantitative data.

During the later months of the Labour government, cuts had begun to have an impact on the availability of funding. During the first months of the new government, the scale and depth of cuts led to funding 'drying up overnight' according to the TYA's

Chief Executive. Key sources of funding vanished. TYA's plan to roll out the work to two new areas was shelved as there was no alternative funding to sustain work in the original locations. The reduction in funds also impacted on the evaluation of the work: YSDF work was subject to outside evaluation and TYA commissioned the University of Huddersfield's School of Education and Professional Development to undertake the work. The change of government occurred part-way through the process and saw the halving of funds for the evaluation. This impacted on the scale of the work which could be undertaken. Nationally, some final reports' due dates were brought forward and submission occurred before the projects' completion (for example, van der Graaf et al 2011). The DCSF's restructure removed the team to whom the report was to be sent, rendering its completion of relevance to projects only. Evidence was shelved and potentially lost through the abandonment of aspects of the process.

### **Methodology**

As indicated, the research on which this article draws was undertaken originally for the formative and summative evaluation of TYA's YSDF financed project. As such, it provides a case study of detached work and activities set up as the direct result of the detached work initiatives. The quantitative data collected for all sessions by workers were made available together with workers' project evaluations and other papers.

Towards the end of the first year of operation in the period May-July 2010, interviews were held with the five senior TYA staff, for use in the planned formative evaluation report. Semi-structured interviews were also held with sixteen staff delivering the programme, generating substantial recorded material.

Questions echoing those designed for use with workers were used with groups of young people. Epistemologically, this methodological choice reflected the significance of association as a core aspect of youth work. Heath et al discuss research with young people and recommend they are offered the option of group interviews which are 'more empowering' and 'less intimidating' (2009, p.90). Members of the University's evaluation team, who are all professionally qualified youth workers, met with 4 small groups of 2-6 young people. The young people concerned were those who arrived on the particular evenings and were self-selected: no appointments were made and the location was the open-air site where they chose to meet. They were all in regular contact with TYA workers but were not necessarily typical of TYA's clientele. In addition, representatives of two other voluntary agencies, local stakeholders, the mother of a participant and local Action Group were interviewed. In several cases these interviewees volunteered themselves due to their enthusiasm for the work. Although the same questions were used, the sample was thus far from reliable.

The relationship between University staff and TYA is multi-faceted and of long standing. Several TYA staff studied at the University. Some TYA staff have lectured and been outside speakers at the University. Students have been on work placements with TYA. This means that University and TYA staff are well acquainted with one another without being actual colleagues. Furthermore my inside knowledge of the organisation is based on long service in the role of Trustee. I have also researched the organisation's history (see Jones 2011). This clearly had potential to add difficulties in terms of hierarchical relationships. In this instance though, the close relationship was an advantage in terms of familiarity with the organisation's values and methods,

hence the University was invited to tender for the evaluation of TYA's YSDF project. Nevertheless University staff whose personal links were weaker conducted interviews with hourly paid part-time workers and with young people to reduce the potential for negative hierarchical insider impact.

As suggested, the complexity of the relationship between the University and TYA resulted in a situation different from those which generally characterise the researcher as 'insider'. Hodkinson (2005), Edwards (2002) and Mercer (2007) are among the authors who have noted the paucity of literature exploring the implications of being an 'insider' engaging in research. Although it could be argued that each insider's situation is unique and worthy of analysis, there are two relevant broad categories which have been considered in the restricted range of academic writing: first the researcher who is involved in ethnographic research such as Hodkinson (2005) and secondly the researcher who works within the organisation which is the focus of their interest, for example Edwards (2002) and Mercer (2007). Hodkinson's focus was the ethnographic study of the enduring goth subculture as an insider: he works as an academic by day but is a goth dj by night (Petridis 2012). Mercer's interest lay in practitioner research in educational settings and particularly the challenges facing teachers and administrators studying for qualifications and engaging in research at their place of work (2007). A few years earlier, Edwards (2002) had explored the situation where the researcher is embedded in the organisation being researched as a long-standing member of staff. He devised the phrase 'deep insider research' to characterise the profound understanding developed in such a context. His observations included the advantage of understanding 'organisational history and personal relationships' and the 'rapport' which can lead to greater access. Although

the level of embedding in this instance does not precisely match the situation outlined by Edwards, the professional and institutional knowledge corresponds and has equally positive scope.

In order to ensure validity, the research team shared responsibilities including conducting interviews. Whilst using multiple interviewers has potential to weaken the consistency of research, in this case it was seen as strengthening the findings by reducing the possibility that they were partial or subjective. However as stated, the young people who were interviewed were self selected and did not include those who do not engage with TYA on the evenings in question. Interviewees included those who participated in the two young people's steering groups established by TYA's workers together with those who were less frequently involved. Resultant data took the form of interview transcriptions, statistics collected by TYA and items also generated by TYA such as case studies and evaluation reports. The main themes were suggested by the YSDF requirements but were amended in the light of the changed circumstances and the demise of DCSF when the key focus shifted to points relevant to TYA.

## **Findings**

When data were analysed, a number of key themes emerged. The first concerned the result of TYA's attempt to remain faithful to traditional youth work values and methods despite the government's target-driven culture: the tension between qualitative and quantitative drivers. Secondly, professionally qualified senior workers sought to work with young people in ways which corresponded with their traditional professional skills, values and knowledge despite the imperative to meet ambitious

targets. Thirdly, issues of young people's territoriality were raised together with the capacity of youth work to address the matter. Finally, the work had been required to tackle concerns about anti-social behaviour including drinking on Friday and Saturday nights. In addition, different interpretations of 'sustainability' came to light as circumstances showed DCSF's concentration on financial diversification to be flawed. Each of these aspects is discussed below.

### ***Values and Targets***

TYA's tender had set out ambitious targets for meeting high numbers of 'new' young people: a pressure which was new for some youth workers. There were fears that workers' scope to build potentially enduring relationships with individuals and groups incrementally might be threatened by the hunt for 'new' contacts. According to one worker the targets 'hit us like a juggernaut' but TYA staff were confident that the quality of the work had been maintained: they were able to stay focussed on developing understanding with the young people.

At the height of the work, two teams of 8 staff (mostly hourly paid part-timers) delivered three sessions per week in residential housing estates in two local authority neighbourhoods. Over eighteen months, workers in one area made first contact with 2198 young people and reached a total of 4936 engagements which could be anything from a brief exchange of pleasantries to participation in an evening's activity. In the other area, workers encountered 2247 young people and reached a total of 6692 engagements over the same period. In one estate alone, TYA met 753 young people. Census data for the estate suggest a local total of around 1000 people aged 13-19 years. Thus TYA workers apparently met numbers representing over 75% of the

locally resident young people. Even allowing for young people's mobility, this is an impressive total but opens questions about the possibility of engaging in value-based work. One worker commented that targets 'drive you sometimes to do a bit more' and the division of the work into two neighbourhood teams added potential for in-house rivalry. However another stated, 'Counting young people is not youth work', adding,

I'd rather go out and see three young people and have a really good session on alcohol or drugs than see fifty young people and only say 'hello how are you doing' and move on.

Whereas detached workers in city centres focus on populations which are somewhat transient, TYA workers had populations which were more static and generally restricted to people living locally. Young people almost inevitably returned to meet with workers; a sign that the workers had achieved a form of voluntary engagement which the young people found attractive. The use of digital devices reduced the time required to record each meeting with every young person: staff were not burdened with a paper-based system although accurate record keeping could be subverted if young people volunteered transparently fictitious identities such as Lady Gaga or Mickey Mouse. However the element of surveillance was unavoidable for those who wished to participate in trips or residential where honesty was required. Essentially, this meant that young people were in the position of trading information about themselves for involvement for outings.

As well as counting engagements, TYA workers recorded the number of young people showing soft outcomes which might be attributed to their interventions.

Pinnock et al (2011) identified four groups of soft outcomes: 'key work skills ...

attitudinal skills ... personal skills [and] practical skills' (2011, p. v). TYA designed a

format which enabled workers to quantify soft outcomes and they endeavoured to capture qualitative data. Although this could be difficult and remained somewhat anecdotal, TYA staff wrote up some examples as case studies for internal use. The data collection guidance explained,

[Young people] might have gone from being too shy or suspicious ... to really opening up to youth workers. They might have learnt a new skill.

Other soft outcomes could include improvement in social or emotional skills, building of confidence etc..

Evidence could take the form of photographic, recorded or written material. This was a structured attempt to secure substantiation of the sorts of outcomes which youth workers often describe in anecdotal terms but can rarely demonstrate. One worker explained how a group or individual developed over 'a few months' from an initial encounter but added that the writing of a case study was difficult:

All along the way they have been asking you for little bits of advice because they have grown to trust you and you can see how that's impacted at the end. You become quite proud of them ... but sometimes you can't get it all across on paper, like how much of an achievement it is.

Another worker described how young people, on seeing them, would 'come away from what they are doing with the drinking ... and come over and talk'. They identified this as a positive change. Anecdotes do not carry much weight in terms of credibility but TYA's approach generated quantitative records which added rigour. Increasingly youth workers are under pressure to express their work in quantitative terms which can be appreciated by outside agencies, politicians and different professionals and which echo the credentialised culture of formal education.

If success is measured by quantitative measures and soft outcomes, by decreased rates of [Anti-Social Behaviour \(ASB\)](#) in localities where TYA's detached workers were based and by young people's professed enjoyment, the work was successful. Where measures of sustainability are used however, it is difficult to see a similarly positive result. Jeffs and Smith suggest that young people value 'local activity involving local people' and opine, 'Youth work based in civil society tends to entail long-term, open-ended work defined by local needs and local people' (2010, p.7). As discussed, 'Aiming High' made similar points. Individual young people may have learned from the TYA's workers' input which could have long-term benefits but without longitudinal data, this will go unmeasured and subsequent governments' interest in discovering 'what works' will be frustrated (House of Commons 2011b). YSDF's identification of sustainability in largely financial terms diminished the potential longer term impacts for the communities concerned. The new UK government's rejection on ideological grounds of their predecessors' approaches to working with young people removed scope for distinguishing worthwhile aspects; a position exemplified by the curtailment of YSDF evaluation noted earlier.

### ***Traditional Youth Work***

The core of TYA's YSDF programme was detached work in housing estates. Given the comparatively static groups encountered in their scheduled visits, workers had the opportunity to build up trusting relationships. This resulted in a tension between the imperative to ensure ambitious targets of 'new' young people were met and the value of association. One worker observed that the young people, 'Have got the stability of us going out every week and they have got someone they know they can talk to in

confidence'. Although the collection of detailed quantitative data did not reflect youth work's traditional values, the way in which workers engaged with young people could be seen as epitomising youth work rather than 'work with young people'.

Workers recorded 'ad hoc activities' such as spontaneous games: during one month, 40 young people in three neighbourhoods participated in 14 different impromptu activities. This work brought together the focus on positive activities and good youth work grounded in association, voluntary engagement and informal education: workers used the funds available to meet young people's needs in a traditional way by seizing the moment. Examples were given such as producing sports equipment from car boots and seizing the moment to insert educational debates: football in the park might present scope to discuss how smoking undermines fitness. A worker explained, 'The activities focus on the issues without [the young people] knowing it': responding to issues immediately and inserting informal education have long characterised youth work (see, for example, Smith's (2001a) account of Brew's work during the 1940s).

TYA's tender identified projects which would be delivered in addition to impromptu games. These included sports, film making, arts and music programmes plus residential where groups would go away for a weekend to participate in specific activities. Ambitious figures were set for each of the types of activity and each three month period saw further targets to achieve: overall 15 programmes of positive activities were to be delivered in each area involving at least ten 'new' young people each time participating in project work. Involvement in projects required participants' commitment over a period of up to 3 months: something mirroring (albeit briefly) the activities typically available to more affluent young people. The tender indicated that

outcomes would be accredited and that this would be achieved as far as possible on the streets. In practice, each activity included recorded outcomes for every young person and a total of 129 young people gained training or qualifications as an aspect of their engagement with TYA.

The young people who were interviewed listed a range of sporting, artistic and residential activities in which they had joined. Most of them had also been involved in the steering groups which participated in planning. One interviewee valued the chance to 'get involved in deciding on future activities for members'. Their input helped to modify the range included in the original plans. Go-carting and rock climbing were high points and a residential was described by one as the, 'best experience I have ever had' whilst another observed, 'It has just been fun trying out new things and enjoying time with new people'. Although the young people had scope to express preferences concerning chosen activities, it was not possible to involve them in all phases of planning. Workers were aware of the limitations: 'You feel like you are forcing something on to them and they have got to like it'. The practical difficulty of actively involving young people gathered on a street corner in planning and costing activities also meant the loss of one aspect of potential sustainability: whilst young people were diverted away from negative activities, they did not necessarily gain the skills to arrange their own positive activities in future. Limiting young people's involvement in the process of planning activities affected the extent to which the educational value of the work could be fulfilled along the lines expounded by Smith in the seminal 'Creators not Consumers' (1982). Smith showed the difference between providing an activity for a group, and scoping and planning alongside a group but did not face the

challenge of working in a public open-air location or of responding to modern ideological policy drivers.

'Aiming High' noted the importance of retaining workers and volunteers but YSDF's criteria did not include the requirement to recruit and train volunteers, whether parents or other local people. This was a significant weakness in terms of sustainability: YSDF emphasised diversification of financial support arguably at the cost of neglecting investment in skills in the community. TYA's workers encountered adults who could have been nurtured and trained as future volunteers but this was not required as part of the project. The continuity which underpins activities in which more affluent young people participate was thus denied to more disadvantaged young people who were not allowed the ongoing support to achieve longer term positive outcomes (DCSF 2007). TYA did not have the capacity to initiate schemes recruiting and training local people and was only in a position to deliver the funded programme.

### ***Territoriality***

Research has shown the 'strong interrelationship between territoriality and disadvantaged areas' (Kintrea et al 2008, p.5); extreme allegiance to a particular estate or community has been linked with economic and social exclusion. TYA soon found that young people from different neighbourhoods and estates did not like mixing with one another and were often actively hostile. A TYA worker commented, 'they just like fighting with each other'. The definition of 'community cohesion' in 'Aiming High' included 'mixing with, and bridging gaps between, young people from different ethnic and faith groups' (DCSF 2007, p.6) but did not recognise the significance of topographically based enmities and differences. TYA worked with

young people from predominantly white estates in former mining communities and also in a city with more mixed populations. Tensions between communities have traditionally been an issue in British cities, towns and villages (for an account of nineteenth century working class rivalries in Yorkshire see Stead, 1992, p.632 and in Manchester see Davies 2009) and as Thomas notes, are characterised by a strong sense of local identity, of ownership and the 'perceived need to defend it' (2011, p.118). Kintrea et al found that, where young people's identity 'was closely associated with their neighbourhoods ... they gained respect from representing them'; a positive motivation linked with friendship and status (2008, p.4). Thompson (2011) considered the matter of inflexible loyalty to a particular locality and consequent prejudice against outsiders. He identified its 'complex and ambivalent relationship with inequality' and explained that,

an extreme over-rigid identification with stereotypical norms provides a degree of ontological security, but at the expense of contributing to the maintenance of patterns of inequality by discouraging any challenge of threat to the status quo and the power relations up on which it rests' (Thompson 2011, p.43).

TYA workers challenged such rigidity and the resultant prejudices and devised initiatives to bring young people together through, for example, football tournaments. When one young man included 'enjoying time with new people' in his list of positive experiences, workers felt this signified willingness to engage in new experiences and was a considerable achievement. Another illustration of how effective this work had been was shown when workers took a group of twenty young people from different areas to Barnsley's 'Love Music Hate Racism' festival. This not only represented building the group but also taking them away from their home territories. Throughout

eight months, workers had established relationships with young people which enabled them to suggest coming together with one another under a banner of 'hate racism'.

The reduction of young people's 'excessive reliance on security' and resulting 'defensiveness and rigidity' (Thompson 2011, p.43) has potential consequences beyond attendance at a single music event following a few games of football. For example, young people's openness to seeking work or attending college outside their immediate locality has potential to increase the range of future opportunities. Kintrea et al identified territoriality's 'negative impacts ... on young people's potential access to education, leisure and relationships' (2008, p.6). For the individual young people who met TYA workers, there could be a bearing on their future prospects: a sustainable change. However, without ongoing input from skilled youth work staff, the sustainability of the work itself, and its continuity in terms of the next generation, cannot be relied upon. Addressing bored young people's tendency towards territoriality and its potential links to crime and gang culture (Kintrea et al 2008) needs ongoing, sustained input which can be achieved by youth workers using informal educational methods (see, for example, Thomas 2011, p95-6).

### ***Friday and Saturday Nights***

As indicated, YSDF programmes were linked with the Labour government's identification of the need for diversionary activities to discourage anti-social behaviour on Friday and Saturday nights. When they were appointed, TYA's YSDF workers knew that the posts required them to work at weekends. At the time, it appeared that many established youth workers, particularly those employed by statutory bodies, had become accustomed to working only weekday evenings and

regarded weekends as their own time unless residential or special events were involved (Boyd, 2011). Although weekend work was contentious in the professional field, TYA staff found both young people and adults responded positively:

They see you as putting yourself out on a Friday and Saturday so they kind of have ... respect for you.

People are shocked that we are out working. I think it helps them think that we do really care.

The fact that the young people and the wider community respected workers who were seen as giving up their weekends provides an interesting message for other programmes. Everyone agreed that Friday nights were busy:

Friday night is the main night that there is young people out there. That seems to be the main night where young people associate and [drink].

Many agencies refuse to work with young people if they are 'under the influence' but TYA was prepared to. The nature of detached work means that it is more difficult to discriminate against individuals who are so drunk that they might be refused entry to a building. TYA's team leader felt that detached workers were in a better position than centre-based staff to discourage the over-consumption of alcohol but he appeared resigned to an intractable problem: 'the fact is young people want to go out and get drunk on a Friday night'. Nonetheless, once relationships had been established workers would say, 'would you mind not drinking whilst we are doing this activity and they will say yes fine'. This establishes a clear difference with some local authority youth workers who work alongside police and are obliged to take a different attitude to alcohol (Boyd: 2011).

Whilst Friday evenings were busy, DCSF's identification of both Friday and Saturday evenings appeared to be based on a perception which was not evidenced in the TYA project areas. Saturdays were 'quiet'. One worker explained,

We get quite good engagement on ... Fridays but Saturdays... they are either already drunk ... because obviously they have been out all day or they are not out at all because they have been to town, they have gone home and just not come back out so ... especially on Saturdays the numbers aren't as high and engagement isn't as [good] quality work.

Another observed,

I think a lot of young people have been to college or school all week and they just unleash on a Friday and by the time they have been to town with their mates on a Saturday afternoon they are wiped. They just want to watch the X Factor.

There was general consensus that Saturday nights did not provide scope for work but the desirability of detached youth workers engaging with young people on Friday evenings was apparent: young people and stakeholders alike were positive about the results of the work. The fact that workers gained respect from young people and communities from working on Friday evenings is also significant and was not anticipated. It is worth noting that Boyd's research covered a wider geographical area and her findings also found a lack of interest from young people on Saturday nights (2011). Where future funding opportunities do not stipulate when work should be scheduled, this needs to be borne in mind.

## **Discussion**

The stated core values underpinning 'Aiming High' included 'progressive universalism' and 'prevention'. YSDF was intended to put 'Aiming High' into

practice but it enshrined an intrinsic flaw in failing to ensure the third core principle, ‘an emphasis on rights and responsibilities’ which demanded the involvement of parents and communities (DCSF 2007, p.15). This core principle was not built into projects. YSDF’s emphasis on organisational governance and financial diversification meant that the potential for community-based capacity building was greatly reduced: there was a gap between the stated policy and the funding available to put it into practice since it was predicated upon the continued availability of monies through a bidding process. As a result, TYA undertook its YSDF project in targeted communities, working with disadvantaged young people who were meeting one another on the streets and in parks, but community development techniques to build local sustainability were not funded. TYA succeeded in taking some initiatives but these were beyond the terms of the funding. This leaves a big question for future temporary funding streams and it could be suggested that promoting continuity in the absence of finance needs to be addressed during projects.

TYA’s detached youth workers endeavoured to base their work in the classical model for youth work of voluntary engagement, informal education and association. This was undertaken alongside the need to meet targets and levels of accountability of the Labour government’s social initiatives and the collection of personal data. This presented youth workers with the ethical dilemma of how to balance the approach required by funders with their understanding of work with young people. Overall TYA’s work illustrated the way in which youth workers can employ their skills, values and knowledge to support ideologically founded attempts to tackle a range of problems associated with social exclusion. Initiating provision on Friday nights demonstrated that ideologically grounded initiatives can succeed but longer term

funding is needed in order to sustain this kind of youth work. Interestingly, this echoes Thomas's (2011) findings: youth workers in Oldham mediated national policies around community cohesion and made them more compatible with both the needs of young people and the ethical base of the youth work provision.

The long term impact of YSDF work was diminished by the lack of funding to support the parallel development of community-based initiatives; the success of ongoing activities available to affluent young people is located in their long-term nature allied with limited reliance on temporary sources of funding. Constructing similar provision for deprived young people needs ongoing financial commitment rather than temporary initiatives identified with a specific party political ideology. In this case, even though local residents were concerned about young people's welfare in the neighbourhoods in which TYA was working, YSDF funded provision lacked scope to have a longer-term impact on neighbourhoods as a community development dimension was absent. Individual young people had their horizons broadened to an extent which reduced 'excessive reliance on security', but this is unlikely to have a longer term ripple effect and reach other community members. History shows that territoriality is grounded in a combination of factors including disadvantage and a strong sense of local identity. Ongoing input rather than a short term injection of funding is needed to combat this. Thomas has shown the value of good youth work in addressing cross-community tensions (Thomas 2011) but long-term investment is a pre-requisite if enduring changes are to be realised and embedded.

## **Conclusion**

This article has discussed how a significant government policy impacted on a long-established CSO undertaking detached youth work and on the young people who benefited from the initiative. Data gathering was facilitated by the multi-dimensional relationship between TYA and the research team which opened scope to explore new dimensions of embeddedness and secure data of relevance both for YSDF formative and summative evaluation reports and for subsequent analysis.

The evaluation of TYA's work showed aspects of youth work practice with scope for future development including ways to marry the traditional values of informal education, voluntary engagement and association with contemporary demands both from young people and government policy. However the identification of YSDF with New Labour meant that initiatives across the country, including the comparatively successful Friday evening work, tended to die out unless ongoing local support ensured continuation. For TYA, at organisational level, YSDF's interpretation of capacity building in solely financial terms reduced the potential for work to enshrine continuity and consistency.

The Policy Review which included 'Aiming High' was designed originally to provide a framework for the period 2007-14 but was shelved immediately following the change of government in 2010. Programmes which had contributed to Labour's strategy were curtailed and many data, including some of those assembled by TYA, were abandoned: a relic of Labour's social policy initiatives. Significant quantities of quantitative and qualitative data were jettisoned as they corresponded with New Labour's ideological vision. Even the phrases 'positive activities' and 'community cohesion' were expunged from national policy and the terms 'targets' and 'outcomes'

were replaced by 'results' and 'impact' according to an internal memo circulated by the renamed Department for Education (DfE) (Puffett, 2010). The hasty and premature ending of the evaluation of YSDF work and the abandonment of 'Aiming High' meant that knowledge of potential significance for future work with young people was not secured. It is unfortunate that temporary funding initiatives demand immediate results despite the fact that 'policies concerning aspects of education require years rather than months to generate measurable impacts' (Jones 2012, p.167).

The shift in ideology, combined with the financial cuts, limited the potential for any joined-up thinking or learning from temporary programmes designed by the previous government: the potential legacy for workers and politicians seeking to build continuity and sustainability was lost. As a result, however meritorious and whatever potential they had to bring about positive changes, programmes were of temporary impact to all save the actual participants. During 2010 members of the coalition government encouraged communities to participate in the creation of the 'Big Society': a new approach to devolving responsibility but inevitably associated with particular party political concepts. Arguably the grassroots work done by TYA under the YSDF umbrella had potential to meet these new challenges and developments would have been enhanced by learning from earlier programmes had the government not been keen to be seen to make swift changes. Rather than introducing change in order to distinguish one political regime from another, future governments, policy makers and practitioners involved in youth work development could benefit from building on earlier programmes to scaffold future practices that put young people's interests, instead of political ideologies, first.

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