

Regional Census - Yorkshire & Humber Highlights

Increasing demand for mental health support set against precarious finances of voluntary sector providers

The latest National Youth Sector Census 'snapshot' report, published by the National Youth Agency (NYA), shows that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) continues to do the lion's share of delivery and that there's an increasing demand for existing services, with more than three quarters of respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber (82%) citing an increasing demand for existing services as a challenge, closely followed by a decline in funding or operating budgets (64%) and staff recruitment (59%)

Youth work organisations are not only operating with fewer, less qualified, staff, 15% of youth organisations across Yorkshire and the Humber say they have waiting lists for support from between one to three months, (compared with the national average of 12%).

Increased demand is starkly pitted against the precarious finances of providers, with nearly two thirds (61%) of youth work organisations who responded to the survey in the region reporting having insufficient reserves to operate beyond six months if their funding stopped.

Kevin Jones, Head of Workforce, NYA: explained: "The funding challenges faced by grassroots youth organisations, in particular, mean that they are stuck in a catch 22 of wanting to expand their offer to extend their reach, but as they are unable to offer the assurance of long-term contracts, they just don't have the capacity to meet the demand for new or more activities, or indeed attract new staff to grow their offer."

This year's Census snapshot report is based on 821 responses, of whom 84% are from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) (up from 82% last year) and the remainder of the 100 responses are from Upper Tier Local Authorities (UTLAs), District Councils, Metropolitan Borough Councils and unitary authorities. There were 80 responses from Yorkshire and the Humber, of which 68 are in the VCS, six are UTLAs, one is a Local Authority, three are part of another statutory service and there's one private provider.

Other key findings relating to youth work activities in Yorkshire and the Humber include:

- 80% report an increase in demand for mental health and wellbeing support
- 79% of organisations report an increase in demand for support responding to violence and crime.
- 45% report an increased demand in services addressing employment, training and skills for work – resonating with the reported rise in young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) reported by Youth Futures Foundation.
- 53 youth sector organisations (66%) operate in the most deprived areas and 17 (21%) operate in the two least deprived quintiles), and it's no surprise that demand is greatest in areas of high deprivation.

Leigh Middleton, Chief Executive, NYA, said: "Our latest Census report paints a rather depressing picture of the state of the youth work sector, but it comes as no surprise that there simply isn't sufficient provision to meet the burgeoning needs of young people.

"Recovery from over a decade of austerity measures amounting to a loss of £1.1bn in real terms cuts to local authority budgets, devastating the sector, is not going to happen overnight. The future is not all bleak however, and we're heartened by the realisation amongst policy makers that the distinctive contextual support which youth workers provide, is a vital

component of broader strategies to improve young people's health, safety and engagement with education and training."

Despite the declining financial health of the sector, there is evidence that youth workers are increasingly embedded in allied settings, in particular in and with schools. In the national survey, more than half (75%) of organisations say they engage with sport and 53% work with the health sector.

Other key Census data for Yorkshire and the Humber includes:

- In terms of the main type of activities delivered each week 72% offer open access youth work with some form of social action or volunteering opportunities being cited as a key activity for 68% of respondents, above the national average of 61%.
- Targeted activities are offered by 55% of respondents, 53% providing other leisure-based activities and 51% offer some form of youth voice work.
- A third of youth work organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber (33%) offer mentoring and befriending support and just over a quarter 27% provide detached (or street-based) youth work, just below the national averages of 36% and 31% respectively.
- A high percentage of youth providers, 87%, offer targeted support around mental health; 72% offer targeted physical health activities, and over two thirds (64%) work with schools and colleges (slightly above the national average of 60%).
- Providing information, is the next most commonly offered targeted activity, at 56% followed by Education, Training and Skills support, which is offered by 51% of respondents.
- 46% of youth work providers in the Yorkshire and the Humber offer targeted support around child and youth exploitation and 42% provide activity responding to violence and crime.
- 45% provide support around identity-based work; 45% support young people who are care experienced and 33% provide support for young carers.

The findings of the NYA's Workforce Survey earlier this year flagged that over half (59%) of respondents have worked in the sector for 10 or more years and over a third (37%) are professional youth workers (with a Level 6 / degree level qualification). The Census 'snapshot' report reinforces this picture, revealing that the majority of staff do not have a youth work qualification, especially amongst smaller organisations.

In terms of staffing, Yorkshire and the Humber reflects the national median average, with three total median employees, but has an amount of volunteer support with median average of one and half, compared to the national median average of two.

The NYA is working with the government, training providers and youth work organisations to help upskill the existing workforce and attract new entrants to the sector and to upskill the existing workforce. Such is the demand for youth workers, a new youth work apprenticeship (at Levels 3 and 6), supported by the government's apprenticeship Levy scheme, has launched this year enabling people to 'learn while they earn'.

Kevin Jones, added: "Whilst all those working in the sector are committed to delivering youth work which is responsive to need and there's evidence of much more cross-sector working and innovative commissioning, we're just not going to be able to provide the level of open-access youth work provision that's required without a concerted programme of recruitment and without VCS providers being provided with a greater variety of funding streams to be able to guarantee their sustainability and grow their reach."

The Census is located on the Youth Work One platform at www.youthworkone.org.uk. The Census is reported alongside an interactive dashboard which allows individuals to drill down into the Census dataset in more detail. Youth Work One is a one stop shop for those working with young people, hosting guidance, resources and a forum to help youth workers improve their practice and network with their peers.

To read the latest National Youth Sector Census snapshot report in full and also view regionalised data go to <https://nya.org.uk/census/>