

The cost of providing street-based youth work in deprived communities

Detached youth workers operating at street level are able to help excluded and disaffected young people in ways not always possible in more formal settings. However, such provision is funded in an ad hoc fashion, so that most of those who could benefit cannot access a reliable service. How much would it cost to provide one? This first in an occasional series of 'costings' exercises following up on JRF research finds that a systematic street-based youth service would cost a small fraction of the amount spent on other services targeted at this group.

Background

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has supported the first major national study of street-based youth work, *Reaching socially excluded young people*. It focuses particularly on detached and outreach work with socially excluded young people and demonstrates the growth of such work in recent years. Its findings show that such work where it exists has proven to be one of the few ways of making and sustaining contact with disaffected young people. Yet no systematic resources are being made available to fund such work, so projects are provided on an ad hoc basis, for example as part of regeneration projects. Their geographical coverage is highly selective and even where projects exist their funding from year to year is insecure.

The Foundation asked Tom Wylie, Chief Executive of the National Youth Agency, supported by George Smith of the University of Oxford, to make an illustrative calculation of what it might cost to provide street-based youth work projects more systematically across deprived local areas in England. This is a summary of those costings. They are not intended to give an exact calculation of the cost of a national street-based youth work programme, but to indicate the order of magnitude of spending that systematic provision would involve.

Calculating a unit cost

Looking at nine examples of projects in different types of area, the study calculated the actual unit cost of a session working with each young person. This may involve a young person at one of two levels: as a simple 'contact' who is known to the youth worker or as a 'participant' involved in various relationships or activities. Observed unit costs were in roughly three categories:

- Low-cost projects spending £3 to £6 per 'contact' and £6 to £16 per 'participant'. These projects were typically not fully resourced, with services only available some of the time and relying largely on volunteer labour.
- Higher-cost projects, with a fuller range of services, where costs ranged from £10 to £17 per 'contact' and £12 to £23 per 'participant'.
- An inner London borough project where unit costs were £25 and £39 respectively.

Based on the information gathered from these examples, the study calculated what it would cost to provide the staffing and other elements required for a full range of services in a 'good practice' project, allowing basic contact with 125 young people per week, of whom 25 would be worked with intensively. The cost of such a project is estimated at £75,000 a year, with a unit cost of £16 per 'contact' and £27 per 'participant' episode.

Table 1: Illustrative cost of providing street-based youth work projects in all deprived areas

Category of small local areas ("super output areas") spend required	Population aged 13-19	Number of projects* needed	Estimated spending required (£m)	Secondary school spend in area (£m)	Per cent of secondary school spend
Most deprived 5%	254,955	325	24.375	585	4.2
Most deprived 10%	494,858	596	44.7	1113	4.0
Most deprived 50%	2,186,727	1,897	142.275	4667	3.0

*Based on scaled provision, higher in areas of greater deprivation: one project per five local areas in the 5% most deprived areas, one per six areas in next most deprived 5%, etc.

Scaling up the costing

To calculate what it would cost to provide street-based youth work projects covering deprived areas in a consistent manner, it is now possible to look at characteristics of very small local areas through the new Index of Multiple Deprivation for England. These "super output areas" have relatively homogeneous populations of about 1,800 people, of whom an average of 130 are aged 13-19. An approach to systematic provision would be to have a project covering a consistent number of these small areas according to the level of deprivation, with denser provision in the most deprived areas.

Table 1 shows the cost of one possible level of resourcing street-based youth work, based on providing one project for an area with a population of about 9,000 in the most deprived part of the country (where only 7 per cent of young people go on to higher education), gradually rising to one project for a population of about 43,000 in the least deprived areas (where about 75 per cent enter higher education). In the most deprived areas, each project would cover a 13- to 19-year-old population of about 800, somewhat fewer than the number in an average secondary school.

On this basis, providing initially for the most deprived 5 per cent of areas would cost £24 million, and to spread coverage to the bottom half would cost £142 million in total. This kind of cost can be looked at in the context, for example, of the £450 million spent on the Connexions service. Also, the table shows that even within deprived areas, these costs represent only a small fraction (4 per cent) of what is spent on secondary schools. Effective youth work can be complementary to school and college provision, and indeed can help re-engage young people with

education. In considering where to allocate additional resources aimed at helping those currently served least by secondary education, the systematic funding of street-based youth work may therefore offer good value for money.

About these costings

Information on unit costs in specific projects was gathered using telephone interviews with the projects, conducted by Terry Cane on behalf of the National Youth Agency. Area-level data were taken from the University of Oxford's Index of Multiple Deprivation for England. Tom Wylie of the National Youth Agency conducted the analysis. A full paper, **Costing street-based youth work**, detailing the calculations can be found at.

The research study, **Reaching socially excluded young people: A national study of street-based youth work** by David Crimmens, Fiona Factor, Tony Jeffs, John Pitts, Carole Pugh, Jean Spence and Penelope Turner, is published for the Foundation by the National Youth Agency (ISBN 0 86155 310 1, price £15.95 incl. p&p). A summary of its findings is published as 'The role of street-based youth work in linking socially excluded young people into education, training and work', JRF Findings No 654.

The costing exercise was a separate, complementary exercise from the research study, and each of these two studies is the responsibility of its own authors.