

Good practice guides for organisations working with young people



5 Good practice in...

reducing cases of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Introduction

In 2011 youth unemployment in the UK reached a new high, with 20.5 per cent of 16-24 year olds out of work.

Young people are entering an increasingly competitive labour market. It is more important than ever that they are equipped with the skills and experience to find and sustain employment. This often means staying in education to gain the qualifications that employers are looking for.

However, in addition to qualifications, employers are also looking for wider skills and softer personal and social skills. The skills that employers regularly highlight include:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- IT
- Team working
- Self-improvement and career management
- Problem solving.

Keeping young people in education allows them to gain qualifications and, importantly, to develop their wider skills. Where this is not possible, alternative provision and informal learning opportunities can also help young people to develop these skills.

This guide outlines the approaches taken by projects funded through the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Young People's Fund (YPF) to engaging young people in learning and reducing their risk of being "Not in Education, Employment or Training" (NEET).

The guide provides advice, practical examples and sources of further information and support for how you can work to re-engage young people in education and develop their personal, social and employability skills. It is based on findings from the YPF evaluation carried out by GEN Consulting and Wavehill Consulting. The examples presented focus on Wales and Northern Ireland where NEET is a specific area of interest for BIG

NEET – A Policy Priority

It is estimated that between 20 per cent and 33 per cent of young people aged 14-16 are disengaged from education¹.

Disengagement is linked to negative outcomes for young people including poor employment opportunities, lower socio-economic prospects, higher risk of drug and alcohol misuse, anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancy.

The lifetime cost to the economy per NEET young person is estimated at £56,301².

The evaluation of YPF highlighted significant success among projects in helping to re-engage young people, helping them to access and achieve qualifications and to develop key personal, social and employability skills.

There was evidence of successful approaches and strategies to re-engage young people with mainstream education, link them to informal learning opportunities, and move them towards further education, training and employment opportunities.

There was a positive impact on schools, communities, and families as a result.

The early signs and risk factors

Young people do not just suddenly decide to disengage from school – school is often where their friends and social networks are strongest. So, what are the triggers and warning signs?

There are many things that indicate a young person is at risk of disengaging. For example: a history of problems in primary school, regular truanting, low attainment, poor behaviour, and poor pupil/teacher relationships.

¹Ross, DfE, 2009

²University of York research undertaken for the Audit Commission: Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, July 2010

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There is no single thing that causes a young person to disengage. The feelings and attitudes of young people towards education are affected by the interaction of a range of factors. These often include one or more of the following:

- ▶ A difficult or chaotic family or home life.
- ▶ Trouble at school (including bullying).
- ▶ Alcohol and drug use.
- ▶ Trouble with the police.
- ▶ Issues with emotional and mental health and well-being.
- ▶ Lack of confidence and self esteem.
- ▶ Lack of or issues with parental/ family aspirations and influence.

How to engage young people

Your project should:

- ▶ Be supportive, listen and be caring.
- ▶ Ensure the project is not like school.
- ▶ Ensure staff and young people are on an even level – no hierarchy.
- ▶ Promote active involvement of young people in creating activities and running projects.
- ▶ Provide individual, one to one support from staff.
- ▶ Encourage, recognise and where appropriate reward achievement in a range of areas.

Strategies to engage and involve young people can be formal or informal.

Formal strategies: Many successful young people's projects have in place formal strategies to engage young people in activity that help develop skills and supports educational attainment. For example:

- ▶ **Partnerships** – including partnerships with schools and local authority structures. In Wales, many YPF projects had partnership arrangements with schools and the Children and Young People's Partnerships.
- ▶ **Agreements with young people** – for example acceptable behaviour contracts.

Informal strategies: Informal approaches can also be very effective in engaging young people in activities. For example, young people may be given the freedom to choose the venues where they meet and the activities they take part in. Examples from the evaluation of YPF are shown below:

- ▶ One project manager allowed young people to choose their meeting place, often an informal setting such as the local McDonalds. This immediately informs young people that this is not school and that engagement is on their terms.
- ▶ One project used outreach workers to engage young people who were gathering in gangs, using drugs and alcohol and fighting. They asked them about the activities they would like to do to spend their time more positively. The young people wanted to make music and create a band. The project took this on board and facilitated music based activities that developed further their personal, social and employability skills.
- ▶ One project engaged young people in informal places such as youth clubs and local chip shops where young people are known to congregate. By engaging young people in locations where they felt comfortable and allowing them to choose activities of interest, the project had a 75 per cent success rate of participants leaving to go into education, training or employment.

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What works?

Behaviour and attitude change: Success is often due to activity that promotes positive behaviour and attitude change; particularly increased self-esteem in young people.

In other words...

...There are a variety of activities that can achieve similar outcomes. It is the process that young people go through once involved that is most significant ...

- ▶ Positive behaviour and attitude change motivate young people to re-engage. This in turn allows them to develop the essential skills they need to stay engaged and progress further. In the long term this can reduce the likelihood of becoming NEET.
- ▶ You can help to bring about positive behaviour, attitude change and increased self-esteem by:
 - ▶ Instilling confidence in young people.
 - ▶ Allowing young people to meet new people, and make new friends.
 - ▶ Giving young people someone to talk to who listens to them.
 - ▶ Providing opportunities to do new things – this can include sports, day trips, learning opportunities, work placement, careers advice, training and gaining a qualification.
 - ▶ Providing young people with a safe, secure environment in which they can meet.
 - ▶ Helping young people to develop their communication skills and their abilities to manage anger and stress to achieve positive relationships.
 - ▶ Providing opportunities to learn in an informal way.

Attitude and behaviour change, is illustrated in case study example one below.

Case Study Example 1

Country: Northern Ireland

Project: Youth Arts Programme

Organisation: Féile an Phobail

The Youth Arts Development Programme works with schools and groups across West Belfast. It works with marginalised young people who are at risk of disengaging from education by using creative and performing arts as a means to explore the issues that affect them.

The project empowers young people to make informed decisions. The participants are actively involved in running the project, choosing activities and organising a Youth Fringe Festival.

The project develops the confidence and self-esteem of young people through group working and performance. Through arts activities, behaviours, social norms and topical issues are explored and challenged. This results in changes in attitude to school and other group and community settings.

The impact is seen by the schools and communities. The projects have anecdotal evidence from schools to suggest there has been a notable improvement in behaviour and attainment and a reduction in anti-social behaviour which they attribute to the project.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

www.feilebelfast.com

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Young people involved in the evaluation of YPF said:

“When I first started going there [to a YPF funded project] my attitude wasn’t the best and I was cocky and cheeky, getting banned a lot. I decided to wise up as I wanted to carry on going and I started behaving better in school too.”

“My attitude totally changed. Before I was hanging around the streets and getting into trouble. After going to the centre my behaviour became better and I got on better with other people and adults”.

Strong social and support networks:

Other people play a significant role in influencing the behaviours and engagement of young people. These influences come from:

- Family
- Friends
- Professionals – teachers and social workers
- Youth and support workers
- Carers.

Your project may be ideally placed to support young people to access strong social and support networks if:

- ▶ You can work with young people informally – unlike schools where learning and development can feel structured and regimented.
- ▶ You provide a safe and comfortable environment in which positive relationships can develop at a pace that suits the young person.
- ▶ You can bring together young people from different areas and different backgrounds to break down barriers and social hierarchies.

Your project should consider:

- ▶ **Staff skills and attributes** – staff should be able to recognise and respond to the needs of the individual in a flexible way.
- ▶ **The mix of young people** – The way in which you bring together young people and promote positive peer support is important. This may be most successful where you bring together a mixed group of young people. For example if all the young people display challenging behaviour it may be difficult to control the group. Conversely, if all of the group lack social confidence it may be difficult to facilitate positive interaction – mixed groups often work best.

An example which illustrates the importance of staff skills and peer support comes from the Pembrokeshire Activity Project.



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Case Study Example 2

Country: Wales

Project: Pembrokeshire Activity Project

Organisation: Pembrokeshire Activity Centre

The project works with NEET young people and young people at risk of becoming NEET.

The project works with participants to re-evaluate their attitude and behaviour. The key aim of the project is to increase confidence, self-esteem and motivation in young people. Project workers are skilled in recognising and responding to the needs of young people and helping them to achieve.

For example, during a case study visit when young people were taking part in rock climbing one young participant did not feel able to take part. With the support of project workers and peers, the young person completed the task and reported the sense of achievement he felt.

In this case, involvement in activities that test and challenge young people is significant in increasing self-esteem and belief in their abilities.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 3 (2009)

Or

www.princes-trust.org.uk/adventure

Where can I find out more?

National structures and policies:

If you would like further information on national structures and policies supporting the engagement of young people into education and reducing the risk of becoming classified as NEET, details can be accessed through the following sources:

- ▶ The Children's Commissioner for Wales.
www.childcom.org.uk
- ▶ Welsh Government: Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning & Skills.
www.wales.gov.uk/?lang=en
- ▶ Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).
www.niccy.org
- ▶ Department of Employment and Learning: Northern Ireland.
www.delni.gov.uk
- ▶ Department for Education.
www.education.gov.uk

For information about support services in your local area, contact the children's services, youth services or equivalent department within your local authority.

If you would like information about the national evaluation of the Young People's Fund contact:

BIG: 0845 410 2030

Copies of the YPF evaluation reports and supporting documents are available online from BIG at:

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/eval_ypf