



Most Significant Change Project 2015

[Abstract](#)

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Introduction

The Most Significant Change (MSC) model utilizes a participatory approach to assess impact. The MSC project, developed in partnership between Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and Voluntary Youth Manchester (VYM), aims to engage systematically with young people and practitioners' sense of what it is they gain from participating in informal youth work processes, founded on the relationship that is fundamental to youth work practice. The methodology was initially developed in the context of development work in Africa, Asia and Latin America, which aims to create sustainable development which addresses the needs of local people, and move in the direction of greater equality.

Stories are generated within the projects and shared in a brief written form. From these accounts from young people, it becomes possible to give an account from the ground up of the impact of practice. These outcomes can then be interpreted – at the level of a local authority's commissioners or of other funding bodies – in relation to other grids of desired policy outcomes.

A key strength of this model is that it enables the showcasing of the work of small community based organisations on a citywide basis and the contribution which they make to impact, which can be presented on an annual basis. A detailed account of the model is available in the booklet which accompanies this first report. Each of the stories presented here is presented as it was discussed by the moderation group. Each is anonymised.

This is Manchester Youth Work 2015 reports on a process which has been guided by the Pilot developed by Voluntary Youth Manchester in 2014. The project has been engaged with by the following groups:

Phase 1

Tess Gregson, 42nd Street
Lilian Pons, WAC
Myrtle Finley, GMYN
Lisa Samuel, ME1
Samira Bakkiou, Enhance4Youth

Phase 2

Julie Wharton, Hideaway
Alison Chisolm, WRYOA/WHIZ
David Watkins, Manchester Settlement

Boyswork adopters:

Gabe Oyediwura, M13
Andrew Seedall, YPAC
Des Oakley, LevyYouth
Aqeel Burton, Trinity House

Other adopters:

Amelia Lee, Proud Trust
Christine Bogard, WCGH
Fergal McCullough, The Men's Room

Full participation in the entire process came from staff at the following projects:

Whiz, Whalley Range

Whiz is a space for young people to learn, have fun and take part in sport/leisure activities. Its principles are: facilitating the personal, social and educational development of young people; celebrating diversity; empowering young people to achieve their potential; developing self-confidence in order to deal with significant life changes and challenges; giving young people a voice, influence and place in society.

Me1

Positive Personal Development works with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in the Greater Manchester area offering a range of life coaching programmes.

Manchester Settlement

Manchester Settlement is a charity that has been serving communities in Manchester for 120 years; this has always included working with Children and young People. Now based out of Openshaw in East Manchester working with young people is still a key element of our work. The Most Significant Change Project 2015 focused on our youth group based in West Gorton; our West Gorton Youth Group has been running for 3 ½ years and is an open access youth group, with some more targeted work done with the regular members.

The Hideaway

The Hideaway has been providing innovative youth work for 50 years in the Moss Side area. Hideaway is a project for young men and women aged 13 to 25 responding to the issues that are affecting them, such as fear of crime and violence, not having a safe place to be, unemployment and lack of confidence.

Forty Second Street

42nd Street is an innovative Greater Manchester mental health charity committed to supporting young people aged 11- 25 experiencing mental health difficulties. With an excellent 35 year reputation, our unique holistic service model combines therapeutic psychological interventions with advocacy & social care. 42nd Street services include counselling and psychotherapy; one-to-one support, projects and activities, leadership and volunteering opportunities, advocacy, a creative programme and arts space, The Horsfall. We target services to young people at higher risk of poor mental health due to poor access to services e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Questioning (LGBTQ) young people; those with disabilities, including learning disabilities, young parents, young carers and homeless young people. We support young people with complex mental health difficulties due to: emotional, physical and sexual abuse, discrimination, bereavement, attachment difficulties, bullying, anxiety, depression, social exclusion, homelessness, being in the care system, the impact of domestic violence, involvement in the criminal justice system, eating disorders, poor body image, low self-esteem & confidence. We support c. 2200 young people each year and work alongside schools, colleges, arts and cultural centres, voluntary and statutory sector organisations, local businesses and our supporters' network, 'Friends of 42nd Street' to support our vision for young people. We deliver extensive professional services including consultancy, research, publications, and an extensive professional training programme.

These projects have met on four occasions during the course of the year, with consistent representation from all groups. Each participant has – on each occasion - presented at least one story gathered in their own project and relayed as far as possible in the words of a young person concerning the significance (or meaning or value) of their involvement with youth work and the changes that seem to be occurring for them during their involvement. Some of the projects also use more quantitative tools such as grids and scales with young people but this report concentrates on understanding young people's own perspectives on youth work, their take on it. We have also incorporated a discussion of practitioners' perspectives and a sense of the context in which the work is occurring.

Moderation meetings were facilitated by Katie Paxton and Janet Batsleer from MMU (with Katie Paxton undertaking project verification visits) and by Ross Grant from Voluntary Youth Manchester. The 'domains of change' which most Youth Work Projects hope to contribute to in the City of Manchester can be summarised most easily by reference to the Charitable Objectives of projects which usually include statements such as the following: To promote the wellbeing of young people aged 14-25, physical, mental and spiritual; To prevent social exclusion; To enable the personal, social, political and spiritual development/informal education of young people; To enable young people's participation in opportunities and the life of the society of which they are members; To be a strong voice with and for young people in all matters which affect them; To enable the conditions of their lives to be improved; Above and beyond this Youth Projects are routinely expected to contribute to the meeting of key social and educational policy targets (an intensely debated matter): whether this be the reduction of teenage pregnancy, of sexual exploitation, or making a contribution to character building.

Our purpose in the moderation meetings was to listen to and help analyse the stories, which were presented in terms, which generated ideas about change led by young people. The generic headings concerning youth work's contribution, which we have generated included Relationships; Trust; Confidence; Growth and Development; Paths and Journeys; Safe Spaces; Exploring Boundaries and Limits and Self-Reflection: looking back and looking forward.

The annual summative evaluation meeting considered all the 24 stories which had been discussed and analysed and selected the stories which follow in order to illuminate key aspects of youth work in Manchester in 2015.

Theme One

Positive Relationships with Self and Others

The Account - Young Women's Group

Jasmine – Age 24 – Attended approx. 1 year

I'm a bit more confident and happier and I have more friends that I can relate to and I feel safe at the women's group and I can trust people here. My only problem is waking up in the morning in winter.

The women's group is important to me to help develop my social skills and my sensory skills and creativity and art because I have a maths degree; it can be creative but it's more practical. I want to balance my left part and my right part of my brain.

The group has helped me to let go of some of the things I hold on to. It helped me with my family life; to go out more and to not be afraid to try new things that I wouldn't think of like learning the history of 'The Scuttlers' (Manchester gang from Ancoats in the 1800s) because we went on a street tour, and I've never been on a street tour and then we watched a play after (The Scuttlers).

I've learned I can vary; I can be talkative or I can be focussed or distracted – an either/or person.

When I'm comfortable I can be relaxed and open up more and the women's group helps me to do that.

I'm very accepting and tolerant and I like this about me. It's happened more since I've been here.

I was anxious and I stuttered a lot at Uni; I had a rough time. When I joined 42nd Street I opened up and felt happier and free. In the women's group I was nervous at first. The people are very nice and friendly. People grow more comfortable the more you come, I talk to people quite a lot now.

Comment from Moderation Group

I think this story reflects a lot of the good, youth work does in improving young people's Mental Health. One of the key ways they do this is by building up people's positive relationships with both self and others. This case study shows how building a positive relationship with others can help build a more positive view of oneself and vice versa. This did not happen through a great complicated process but through providing the young women with the safe space she needed to be and develop; a safe opportunity to interact with her peers. The final bonus of her story is that it did not just form new relationships it helped improve her wider relationships with her family.

The Account - Open Youth Club

Person 1 (J) 18 White Male 3 years

I was terrible when I started I liked fighting and would see how far I could push it before they kicked me out. As I've got older I've realised YW's to help me and young ones look up to me. YW's have helped by understanding problems and taught me to open up. I can tell Lynn my life story. I got barred and learned that they had to see me in a different light and when they gave me a chance I learned that I had to behave- I was bored, wanted to see my mates, I missed everyone and the staff (Lynn).

Its big, can fit people (everyone) in, got a good stereo, they don't let us fight. I now only scrap if someone upsets but before I'd just fight all the time. Boxing with my friends.

I live in West Gorton. We used to scrap with the Belle Vue Estate. I came here after my head injury and saw the Belle Vue lot and were now all friendly. We used to fight across the dividing road, throwing bottles & that. Now we all love each other and get along.

Comment from Moderation Group

This story shows how building a positive relationship allowed the youth worker to place boundaries and work with a young person to reduce their anger fighting and anti-social behaviour. It demonstrates that it is not one quick conversation leading to a total change in someone's life but a slow and gradual process.

The Account: Open Youth Club

S.W. 15 YEARS OLD – YR11

The interview was started with the Personal Development Cycle (PDC) so S could start thinking about how she felt about different areas of her life. As the worker and S have a long standing youth work relationship the worker was able to use information she had about S's life to enable S to assess her current position quite clearly. From the personal PDC it was clear that S needs support in a number of areas the significant one being school and her ability to focus which has arisen as a result of other things in her life which will be demonstrated throughout this study. (See attached PDC)

S was asked if she understood the term significant change which she didn't really so we talked about the meaning of the term and why we are using the technique as a tool of measure the impact of Youth Work.

What has been the most significant thing that's happened over the last month?

I started self-harming because my uncle hung himself and that had a big impact on me because I was really, really, really close to him and then I turned to self-harming and I just used to sit there and think about things. Sometimes I can get suicidal thoughts like why am I here and stuff. (At this point the youth worker checked with S that she was ok to carry on and reassure S that they would be working with her around her issues.)

Has Youth Work been involved in your life in any significant way regarding that area of your life?

Got me help to talk to people about it and that's helped me because I've stopped self-harming now, I spoke to a Youth Worker before I did it as I was thinking about it but I said I would never do that to myself but I did. It took all the emotional pain from me and it felt like it worked but then I thought about it and I did it more and I started worrying about what I was doing. I spoke to youth workers and didn't want to tell me mum but a youth worker made me understand that my mum would want to know so she could help me as we haven't really spoke about my uncle so she doesn't know I'm upset. I decided to tell her when my brother went to bed and I'm glad I did.

If you didn't have Youth Workers do you think this would have been the same or different?

I'd have most probably carried on self-harming and I most probably wouldn't have told my mum. It would be much harder, with Hideaways being here it's got me through a lot more like, especially with telling my mum.

Is there anything that you've done here that changed the way you think?

Yeah that video we did about men harassing girls in the street, it was good to show people how we feel as they don't know if we're feeling scared inside so like us doing the video it's got out there to let people know. I feel different now and stronger as I know it's not ok because so many other girls don't like it. I feel more confident about saying what I think and I know it's just wrong. I feel like what I have to say about some things is important because so many people have watched the video.

What do you need from your youth workers now when you look at your PDC?

I need more help to concentrate and things because in school I can't really concentrate even one of the teachers said there's something blocking my mind from doing things. I want to carry on the counselling support and being able to talk to you when I need too. If I can start to get right at school I'll feel better about myself too.

Comment from Moderation Group

This story is a powerful account of how one to one youth work averted an immediate safeguarding issue stopping the young person self-harming, and went on to allow them to deal with the deeper route cause of their on-going issues. This was done by building a positive relationship with their youth worker leading to the young person building stronger relationships with their family and talking through the issues they need to deal with. It also shows that getting involved in projects and wider issues affecting others can improve your own self-confidence and wellbeing. It is also interesting to see how the worker used another of the project's assessment tools – the Personal Development Cycle – to support her work.

Theme 2

Confidence

C.B – Young Woman, aged 18 years

Background

Participation is inconsistent and depends what is being offered as well as what is going on in her life such as college and work. If she is involved in a project that is engaging her then participation is very high.

What has been the most significant event or change in your life recently that you can relate back to Youth Work?

Making a video about Street harassment that was down to a project that we had been doing at Hideaway, the video was about older men in the area that want to shout after young women which makes us feel uncomfortable. Making the video let us say how we felt and it was good because we had said that this was a problem and we were able to do something about it. It made us feel stronger and when we showed it to an audience people really listened and that made us feel as though people were interested in what we had to say. The Metro wrote an article about it then we had to go on BBC Radio Manchester to be interviewed and think that was really big as so many people would have heard it. Then we got asked to sit on a panel at the Why Festival about consent and young people so I guess we really did have an impact. It changed me because it made me know that I can change things I don't like and when some people said we shouldn't have done it as it made Moss Side look bad loads of people stood up for us on Facebook and said we'd done the right thing.

Anything else that has happened in your life recently?

I think that youth work has made me value myself more like when this boy I was seeing started getting jealous when other people liked my Instagram pictures I stopped seeing him as I'd learn about relationship abuse with youth workers and knew that this wasn't good. I see a lot of girls my age doing daft things because they like a boy but I don't want to be like that and I think that's a bit down to the stuff we've done here.

What do you feel about this method?

I guess it's ok as it doesn't take too long and everyone will have their own story. The number thing we did at the beginning made me feel good about myself as I don't usually look at the different parts of my life and I realised that I'm happy with a lot of things about myself.

Worker Observations

CB appears more confident since making the video and has been able to handle criticism well due to her self-belief and shared confidence with the rest of the group about the issue. CB is quite focused and her engagement is very much determined by her interest in a project or activity. CB doesn't attend if there isn't a specific reason although when she does get involved in something her participation and engagement is very high. The Personal Development Cycle demonstrated that CB is confident in most areas of her life though she acknowledges that she could put a bit more effort in at college and that she could improve on her well-being by eating better and taking up some form of exercise.

Comment from Moderation Group

This extract shows clearly how the youth work process works well when it offers stimulus and challenge. Work of value for people of value helps build up people's sense of value.

The Account - Open Youth Club

(E) 15 White female 3 years

I used to be dead quiet and all my mates started coming. I'm getting more confident by being around more people. People used to mess about but now the staff help them behave. We go on trips, it keeps us busy and we learn teamwork. It helps me take responsibility for myself.

YW's - we didn't used to talk to them but now were not shy with them, they're really good because they keep on top of things and help us out.

Comment from Moderation Group

Youth work can offer something as simple as an opportunity to grow more confident about socialising in a positive way.

Open Youth Club - The Most Significant Change

Case Study 5

Date: 15/09/2015

Venue: Whiz Youth Project

Name: SJ

Young male, aged 14

Introduction: This case study was written in the young person's words. He was happy to talk freely about his experience here so far.

Worker: I first came into contact with SJ (Y/P) February 2015. Sumit brought to my attention some of the issues he has been managing over a period of time. Most of his concerns were around not being listened to at home and amongst friends, being a target for bullies around his weight and religion and not knowing how to move forward. It was evident from this Sumit had a number of issues which he was trying to manage at any one time i.e. his weight, he was told to lose weight in order to improve on his overall fitness if he wanted to be part of the local rugby team. Having a different religion from other young people in attendance at The project, this made it difficult for him to build on his relationships with other young people. His emotional wellbeing, Sumit has found it difficult in managing his emotions, which has led to some conflict with other members (Y/Ps) at the youth club. However, some of his qualities were evident from the onset: (1) His listening skills, and (2) His willingness to talk about his concerns, and (3) Having the strength and conviction in the face of adversity in wanting to make a difference (with the support of staff from the Whiz project) in moving forward for the better. Sumit's father informed me of his behaviour at home being unacceptable and how the family were finding it difficult managing his attitude/conduct.

However, he did say Sumit was receiving very good reports from school which gave him some hope for the future. It was decided to work on a programme tailored to Sumit's needs, as above. Sumit was consulted about what he wanted out of his sessions. He wanted to work on his overall fitness, joining in with the Thai boxing class every Tuesday and Thursday at the project.

In regards to the he faced at the youth club a number of session/workshops were completed around the bullying impact in the short and long term of bullying. Over time there have been some subtle changes for the better. Sumit agreed to call into the project after school between 4pm – 6pm for his one to one sessions. This would include running, stretching, sit ups, press ups, squats, shoulders/arms and looking at the different ways in managing his feelings/emotion/behaviour in and out of school.

3 month later: Ten months down the line Sumit still has a way to go as some of his training was spasmodic, however, there has been some significant improvement with his fitness and in managing his emotions which was evident on a residential he attended with the project. He was able to demonstrate some self-regulation when managing some difficult situations i.e. having a difference of opinion with other Y/Ps.

Further to this Sumit went for some trials, was accepted back on the local community rugby team, and became captain of his school rugby team, which has improved his self-esteem and overall confidence.

Sumit's Story

"Since starting my one to one sessions, I feel I have someone who will listen to me, at last. Sometimes I feel angry over things at home, always getting into trouble with my Mum and Dad and sisters and I find hard to deal with sometimes. Being able to come here and speak about what's happening helps me get things off my chest - I'm much calmer and can focus more on what I want to do!

I want to start training with the school rugby team, but I was told to lose some weight first, by my teacher. It's good that I get to go for runs in the park, and do Thai boxing on my own because I don't like to take part in the sessions – I'm too embarrassed. I am much fitter now and more confident. I have some rugby trials coming up; I just hope I get on the team.

I enjoy coming to the youth club more now, because of the one to one sessions – and gets me out the house too. I used to get bullied because I have another religion, and that used to get me really mad. I used to cry in anger, nearly ending up in fights. Now, I know that it's best to walk away, and speak to Steve about it. The workers did a session on bullying because of it to and that helped a lot.

I know my Dad says I don't behave at home and that am cheeky with my mum and sisters and don't listen but I get p'd off because I don't have my own room just now. When you ask my Dad about how I was getting on in school my dad said all my reports were good - that made me feel really good coz he actually told you that. I want to continue with the one to one work - I have missed some session but Steve never shouts or tells me off he just says it's your time make the best of it".

3 months later... How's things?

"I have made more friends here and I have a best friend too – he comes for one to one sessions and sometimes he comes with me too. We train together".

Anything else?

"I'm in the school rugby team – the captain! And I'm in the community rugby team too!"

I feel amazing about all this. I love coming to the club, and I'm even joining in the Thai boxing sessions now – I'm loads more confident and feel good about myself. Steve's amazing – I think he's great. He encouraged me to do stuff on the 'resi' [residential]x that I didn't want to do at first, but felt great when I did. I feel like I can do anything now!"

- SJ, aged 14

Comment from Moderation Group

This account shows confidence building for this young man over time, as he developed strategies for dealing with the bullying he was facing. It shows how one-to-one work in an informal setting, combined with access to opportunities through the club, can help defuse anger and how friendship can build up.

Theme 3

Development Growth and Learning

The Account - Coaching and Group Work

In August 2014 I joined aged 25 to ME1 volunteer team and I have done around 10 different training courses internally and externally. Now 26 years old I get a lot of experience, had professional discussion with, Lisa, and now have clearer picture of what I want to do in future. I have a chance to find a job with degree than in last year. In the last year I have opened my eyes to the affects and impacts of issues young people face from training done. I see the good model of organisation meeting with young people and I want to do this similar work/setup own business in Hungary and help people and employ people. There is not much support for young people there when I go visit home I have been looking at funding to get help. .I have done workshop/sessions with different types of young (female) people understanding a better way of working with young people now got experience.' I know when I look for other volunteer places – that they just want me to work, but not enough staff members teaching me'. 'ME1 helps me too develop myself, grow and not staying in one place, as I feel if you in one place and not going anywhere you just lose interest after here.' Place14:00-15:00 place @The shed Manchester MSC- female volunteer.

Comment from Moderation Group

This story was selected under the theme of 'development, growth and learning' as not only does it reflect an individual young person's educational development, it also explores their personal growth and self-reflection. It exemplifies the role that youth work plays in supporting young people to develop confidence and skills but also in offering opportunities to extend learning and skills development via volunteering to support others in their own learning and development. One of the interesting dynamics in this young person's account, is its placement within a European context, whereby the storyteller not only reflects on her own achievements and knowledge gained but also how this may then be used to develop opportunities for her peers in Hungary. This young person has accessed considerable numbers of training courses and had access to mentoring and guidance, offered as part of a holistic and supportive volunteering youth work model. Particularly in the context of youth employment, this case study enables us to understand the meaningful role, which can be played by youth work organisations in supporting young people in a way which is both accessible and enabling in a highly competitive job market where a strong CV and communication skills are essential.

Theme 4 Safe Space

Open Youth Club - The Most Significant Change

Date: 27/01/2015

Name: Young female, aged 18

This case study was written in the young person's words. She was a bit nervous at first, therefore we started off just chatting about general stuff to help her relax and feel comfortable. Ayesha comes from a single parent, all female family, is seen to be attracting a lot of male attention, because she has changed how she looks; wearing a lot of make-up, dying her hair, and wearing clothes that would be seen as inappropriate in her culture. She was excluded from school in years 10/11, and her exam results suffered as a result. Her mother, who works very hard to support her daughters, approached our project to ask if we could help get her daughter back on track, as she didn't know how to deal with her daughter. She did mention that she was happy for her daughter to have her own individual identity, accepting that she isn't conforming to the Muslim faith. However, she was afraid her daughter would get out of control. The young woman describes herself as being a over-confident and a bit 'forward' in her manner, and people do not like this. We recognized that Ayesha is indeed confident, though perhaps a bit lost, therefore looking for some direction. Her behavior around young men was inappropriate, but not unusual for a young woman at this stage in her life. She sometimes smoked weed and stayed out late. She is very much an individual who will learn by her mistakes, as she was determined to do what she wanted. She regularly came in to the project for one-to-one support, where a member of staff would advise her so that she kept herself safe.

Ayesha has been coming to for eight years.

Ayesha: "The club is like a second home to me – I know I can talk to staff about things I couldn't speak to anyone else about, even my mum. At one point I was really going off the rails – and Whiz helped me get back on track. M (male worker), has been there for me when I've needed help sorting out stuff that got out of hand - I think people can take the 'P' when they know I don't have a Dad or brother. I also did my work experience here because at that time I was really scared about doing it anywhere else. And I volunteered on different projects, including bag packing, and a litter pick with the police in the community – this all helped when I started applying for jobs because it looked good on my CV, that I also got done at the project. Staff helped me believe I could get the jobs, and even if I didn't they just said that it was all part of my learning, that I'd do better next time and I did – it got much easier. Whiz helped me find myself and am much more confident because of this."

"I still come go to the club for help and advice. I am a much better person because of this." Young female, aged 18

Comment from Moderation Group

The role of the youth project in creating safe, affirmative spaces in young people's lives cannot be overstated. This story explores the extent to which the neighbourhood based youth centre is a locus for the community, in a similar way to religious centres and cultural venues. Young people, like Ayesha, form strong bonds with youth workers and understand the voluntary nature of youth work as a vital resource for both learning and development, social bonding and also as a first point of contact when things go wrong in their lives; Ayesha talks about Whizz as somewhere which 'helped me get back on track.' This story highlights the role of youth projects in supporting the wider family, perhaps for many young people, around a need which may never progress to statutory social care, but which may benefit from an independent supporter role from a trusted source. In this story, Ayesha's mum raises a wish to gain additional support and feels able to speak openly with Whizz, trusting their knowledge and experience. Whizz is able to offer a positive approach and offer the benefit of a strong male role model to support Ayesha in her journey to greater confidence. The youth work described in this story explores the different ways in which young people are able to grow in confidence and connect to others in their community, feeling 'part of' as opposed to outside of. This connection to others through activities such as volunteering, combined with individual support and key work relationships with youth workers is powerful in supporting young people early on, as they are beginning to identify need.

Open Youth Club - Most Significant Change

Date: 12/10/2015

KB - Young male, aged 14

This case study was written in the young person's words. He was happy to talk freely about his experience at the project. His mother also gave us feedback and consented to us to disseminate his story.

Introduction:

KB started work with a member of staff from the project in May 2015.

Worker:

When I first met with KB he came across as a troubled young man and would always stand up for himself, (not always in the right way) when navigating himself around the youth club. I could see other young people found it difficult to engage with him during the Thai boxing class. However, he would always speak to staff with respect. This gave me the opportunity to speak with him about what he wanted out of life and the best way to go about achieving his goals. KB spoke about being bullied in school saying it would not happen at the youth club. It was at this point I decided some work needed to be completed around managing his feelings/emotions, which he agreed to. He spoke about punching the wall when angry, but did not like or want to hit other young people. This in itself was him being empathic, drawing from his own experiences. KB spoke to me about missing out on schooling and falling behind with his maths. We decided to meet every Tuesday Wednesday for a couple of hours each day completing GCSE level maths. Further to this KB spoke about not being able to tell the time and asked for further support in this area (he agreed his mother should be kept informed). KB completed 8 weeks of maths and learning to tell the time. As part of the health and wellbeing programme he also takes part in the Thai boxing/fitness classes on a Tuesday and Thursday. KB is quite adept at Thai boxing and is able to offer support to other young people in attendance. Over time, KB has built really good relationships with a couple of young people who attend the project, which has gone from strength to strength. On observation it was evident all three have a positive influence on each other. KB has been coming to Whiz for about 18 months.

KB:

"The biggest change for me is my confidence. That's because I can now tell the time and I've improved with my maths too. I felt safe speaking with Steve (youth worker) who took time out to work with me one to one. I wasn't embarrassed I just knew he would help me."

"When I first started I didn't always get on with the other young people, it took some time to change my attitude. Steve spoke to me about the importance of building good relationships with other young people at the youth club. I feel more relaxed now and less stressed when people annoy me, I just deal with it better; I love attending Thai boxing every week; I'm one of the best. I've had someone to one with Steve with this too - great. (smile 😊)."

I was allowed to attend a residential weekend with the youth club - it was brilliant, we did some trekking across country, canoeing, hiking, gill scrambling, swimming and zip wire. The best bit was canoeing I got some good experience, I really pushed myself to the limit I felt really good about it, being away from home and all that, wow! It was great I would go again tomorrow if I could. I have some new friends at the youth club too - it's been really good lately, a lot better than before, I just love coming here."

Mum:

"The project is KB's sanctuary. It's his safe haven from all the problems and bullying he has suffered at school. He trusts staff here and has a great support network. He knows he will be listened to there and gets good constructive feedback about his behaviour that he can take back into school. Prior to coming to the project he was a very frustrated and angry young man, often being misunderstood and un-heard. His over enthusiasm can be misconstrued as arrogance and this often caused him trouble. He has been able to understand himself more, through getting intensive one-one support. He now takes others feelings into consideration. He was excluded at school for a little while and was able to get support at Whiz, keeping him on track. Not only that; he can now tell the time – he was really embarrassed about that before. My son could have easily slipped through the net - thanks to them this isn't happening."

Comment from Moderation Group

This story really captures the way that one to one support offered by the Youth Project linked to opportunities to explore and channel anger and also to take on a positive role. This included the opportunity to build up sufficient trust with staff to be able to tell the truth about his learning needs, especially basic needs such as reading and telling the time. It takes courage to do this and encouragement to find the courage and the project gave him this. From there he could start learning.

Conclusion

Relationships; Trust; Confidence; Growth and Development; Paths and Journeys; Safe Spaces; Exploring Boundaries and Limits and Self-Reflection. All these are of course recognisable features of the practice of community-based youth work and out of these examples it is possible to see in a fuller way how youth work may at times contribute to wider strategic goals.

In 2016 we contributed from this enquiry process to the Briefing Paper for the proposed Manchester Play and Youth.

Janet Batsleer drafted a report based on both her own research and the Most Significant Change enquiries. She reported as follows on the MSC work:

The Most Significant Change Project

For two years Voluntary Youth Manchester has been working with MMU to develop a process of gathering evidence about youth work which is based in an open method called 'The Most Significant Change.' This first round of this process will be completed in January 2016 and it is likely that a small publication describing both the Most Significant Change methodology and the results of the first process will be published later in 2016.

The Most Significant Change (MSC) tool is an effective means of evidencing the practice of youth work. It offers a qualitative impact measurement tool that can be used by youth workers to demonstrate the difference we make, though the stories and lived experience of the young people. As a tool, it will enable us to learn from what works with young people, and to inform how we go about things in future.

The key thing about MSC is in the way that it is integral to youth work practice, rather than an add-on. So it is all about the quality of the relationship, about conversations, about reflection and reflective practice, and while the initial implementation will mostly take place in a one-to-one setting, in learning from it and in enabling it to inform future practice, it underlines the value of group-work.

The reason for this is that it works on the principal of domains of change – whereby once stories have been collected, common themes can be identified, within organisations, and across them by way of a moderating group.

What follows therefore is a brief indication of the themes generated by discussion of the statements concerning the value of youth work, generated by the young people who have contributed to the project so far. The quotations beneath each heading are from young people. The brief comment in italics gives a sense of how the evidence generated in the Most Significant Change process might be used as supporting evidence of youth work's contribution to wider social, educational and health impacts.

Confidence

'I joined age 14. I feel more motivated keeping fit as had funding support for a gym pass. It really helped. My confidence has increased eg taking part in a Music workshop doing DJing and Spoken Word to produce a song. I spoke/put vocals on a track which I would not have done before. This was due to people we work with being caring, helpful and supportive.'

This clearly links to outcomes of confidence and self-esteem.

Safe Space

'This place is like a second home to me. I know I can talk to staff about things I wouldn't talk to anyone else about, even my mum. At one point I was really going off the rails. The staff here helped me get back on track. N was there for me when I needed help sorting out stuff that had got out of hand- I think people can take the P when they know I don't have a dad or a brother. I also did my work experience here because at the time I was really scared about doing it anywhere else. And I volunteered on different projects including bag packing and a litter pick with the police in the community. This all helped when I started applying for jobs because it looked good on my CV. that I also go done at the project. Staff helped me believe I could get the jobs and if I didn't they just said it was all part of my learning and that I'd do better next time and I did. It got easier. This place helped me find myself and I am a much better person because of this.'

This clearly links to outcomes related to emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Finding a better way

'This youth club is one of the best things I do. It keeps me off the streets, away from police and drugs. I have been arrested before for possession of cannabis, theft and criminal damage.

It's made me think of myself better, the staffs treat you as friends and give you advice to keep away from bad behaviour. We want it to be open more days. Mondays aren't enough. Other youth clubs are to get you jobs, this one is for us, it's fun, every-one's friendly, there's no bullying.

It's taught me to socialise better, not with the wrong people. I've had chats with staff about police and how to deal with them, my rights. Some Police stop us for nothing and sometimes I'd be kicking off, kicking the van, and now I'd keep calm and go along because staff have taught me the benefit of being calm. Still have ups and downs but now I get over it.'

This could clearly link to outcomes discerning desistance from crime.

Trying New Things and Being Open Minded

'As a result of the women's group I think I'm socialising more and doing new things that I wouldn't normally do like the art stuff and talking to new people. This is important because I feel more relaxed. It's actually taking the time to sit down and do something different instead of work then going home to clean. The workers help because they ask for our input and there's different activities so if you don't want to do one, there's others. I think they take the time to come individually and ask if you're alright and if you're upset in the group they will come and sit with you.

I feel I'm more open minded now than I was because we're all different and like, some of the people I wouldn't normally socialise with. This is a good thing.'

This clearly links to outcomes of personal development and improvement in mental health.

Respect

'Before I came I was getting into trouble on the streets cos I had nowhere to go and I was h to bquiet no arguments and good music. I was mixing with people who were peer pressuring and I got into trouble for vandalism and doing silly things like going into gardens and places I'm not supposed to be. At the Youth Club, when I'm not here I don't go out now because I'm occupied here and I have something to look forward to in the week. Staff are nice and generous and treat me the way I like to be treated so I give them respect. It's helped me to learn to give other people respect, I had manners and it's helped me develop more manners and stopped me giving attitude.'

This clearly links to outcomes concerning community cohesion and also to self-worth.

The brief indications given here of the links to 'outcomes' should suggest a lightness of approach to social policy targets which is necessary if youth and community work methods are to retain their intrinsic power. This has been called 'the youth work paradox.' The essential point is that, in establishing trusting relationships in the here and now which are focussed on the needs and interests of the young people and their capacity to support one another, it is likely that youth work will make a contribution to many social and educational policy agendas. However, if the targets are used to drive the practice, it is more than likely that they will not be met so successfully.

It is proposed to continue these transformative and open evaluation processes next year in a partnership between MMU and Voluntary Youth Manchester.