



Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities, DCSF

Views of the voluntary and community youth sector from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

January 2008

Introduction to NCVYS

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's policy officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041 or email hannah@ncvys.org.uk

1. Introduction to the views of the voluntary and community youth sector

1.1 Following the release of *Aiming high for young people: a ten year youth strategy for positive activities* by DCSF and HM Treasury in July 2007¹, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) has facilitated a number of events and workshops to gauge the views of its membership on the strategy and its effective implementation. These events included:

- a round table attended by 20 member representatives and Anne Weinstock, then Director: Supporting Children and Young People Group, DCSF;
- a Council for Voluntary Youth Services (CVYS) residential;
- a seminar at the G:Up Big Event in the West Midlands
- a Chief Executives meeting attended by Chief Executives from NCVYS member organisations as invited by Susanne Rauprich, Chief Executive, NCVYS

1.2 On the whole the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS) welcomes the youth strategy and its efforts to rebalance the debate surrounding young people within our community. There is a clear attempt to try to shift away from labelling young people as a problem to supporting them to fully participate in their communities and society, and to make a positive transition into adulthood. However there are concerns voiced by the VCYS around local implementation of the strategy and what exactly some of the terms and proposals mean. Furthermore it is crucial that the recognition of the role and contribution of the third sector made throughout the strategy is reinforced throughout its implementation at a national and local level.

1.3 NCVYS recognises that the policy context around, and interlinking with, the youth strategy is constantly evolving, for example pathfinder projects are being rolled out and the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill is going through amendments in Parliament. In December 2007 NCVYS welcomed the launch of *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures* (DCSF, 2007)² as building on the youth strategy in developing integrated working and the role of positive activities in the lives of young people. As with the youth strategy local implementation is at the heart of *The Children's Plan* so a positive working relationship between central government, local government and the

¹ Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities (DCSF, 2007) is available via: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/index.shtml>

² The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures (DCSF, 2007) is available via: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/?pid=childrens_plan

VCYS is again crucial to help develop services and support for young people living in our society today.

2. Headlines

- **VCYS concern about a national strategy reliant upon local implementation for its successful delivery**
- **Third sector capacity; representation; commissioning and funding**
- **Positive activities for all – access and opportunities**
- **Transition to adulthood; what and when is it?**
- **The youth leadership fund; just another accreditation scheme?**
- **Remember the volunteers!**

3. **VCYS concern about a national strategy reliant upon local implementation for its successful delivery**

3.1 Youth strategy - national strategy at a local level

The VCYS welcomes *Aiming high for young people* and the focus of DCSF on getting children and young people back on the political agenda. The government has placed a great emphasis on the role of local government in delivering the youth strategy, and as the locally elected body there is clearly a strong case around supporting local democracy in doing so. However government has to ensure that local authorities (LAs) deliver this challenging agenda of change with the consistency and passion that it deserves. A central plank of successful implementation will be the relationship between the VCYS and LAs. This is where the detail of the delivery plan will be crucial. For too many of NCVYS members the inconsistency of their relationships with local authorities is one of its primary features. The VCYS recognises the need to be proactive and if necessary develop their links with LAs to ensure that the best possible services are being offered to young people. Furthermore an understanding of the variance in local areas of provision, partnership working and VCYS engagement needs to be considered when trying to implement a national strategy at

a local level. Different areas face different challenges and barriers to providing services for young people, be it facilities, access or poor relations between the VCYS and the LA. National policies need to allow for this variety and ensure good practice is carried out in all localities.

The Children's Plan is also a national strategy reliant upon local implementation and NCVYS is encouraged by the Plan's recognition that LAs need to work with the VCYS to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life. However, again successful implementation at a local level will rely on central government commitments being cascading down through LAs.

3.2 DCSF Youth Taskforce

DCSF herald the new DCSF Youth Taskforce 'as a streamlined driver for improved delivery' (*The Children's Plan*, DCSF, 2007:133), however there has been little communication with the VCYS about the details of the Taskforce. NCVYS would like to engage with the Taskforce at all opportunities to facilitate communication between DCSF and the VCYS. NCVYS also looks forward to the publication of the Taskforce's action plan in spring 2008 and hope that the initial momentum of the youth strategy is not lost.

3.3 Promotion of best practice

More needs to be done to ensure that best practice in working with the voluntary sector is not confined to a few islands of success but that we are working towards spreading best practice across the board. This agenda must be about LAs and the voluntary sector working together in a mutually challenging but trusting environment. This is happening in some LA areas but needs to happen in many more. Many organisations in the voluntary sector need to see evidence of changes in attitudes and delivery towards them and to feel as though they are equal partners in these crucial local relationships. The strategy has set out its stall for the VCYS to be a critical, equal partner in the delivery of this ambitious vision for services for young people, we need to see that vision expressed and delivered locally. Central government needs to promote good practice and increase the number of levers that will result in consistency of service delivery across all boroughs, such as the involvement of young people in decision making.

The VCYS is aware of good examples of best practice by LAs in delivering services and working with the third sector, and would be willing to help promote these and raise the level of local service delivery nationwide. In order to encourage best practice central government may consider an incentive/rewards scheme for LAs that can be named as examples of best practice. Furthermore the VCYS recognises the need to be proactive in its attempt to engage with LAs and show what valuable work is being done within the community and with young people.

Lincolnshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (LCVYS) Website Launch

To promote LCVYS and its resources and the activities and work of its members to others working in the Voluntary and Public Youth Sector, LCVYS held a celebration event to launch its new website. LCVYS invited LCVYS members, Local Authority staff from Children's Services and other voluntary youth organisations to an evening event which included a meal, presentations by young people from LCVYS groups and an opportunity to network. This was followed by a Cedliah.

Over 50 people attended the event and it helped raise the work of the voluntary youth sector organisations to the LA. The young people involved in the presentations were invited to attend other events. It was also an opportunity for staff and volunteers from all sectors to network and share good practice.

4. Third sector capacity and representation

As Rt Hon Beverley Hughes, Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families, stated at a conference in December 2007³;

The role of the 3rd sector in working with young people is clearly already crucial; in many areas voluntary sector provision is the bedrock of what's on offer..... I have no doubt that Aiming High will fail to realise its potential unless the 3rd sector is heavily involved.

To enable this essential third sector involvement capacity building and support needs to be in place. Small local voluntary youth organisations may not have the capacity to attend the many local meetings as workloads and resources are already stretched. VCYS nonattendance at local partnership meetings, for example Local Area Agreement (LAA) meeting, may also be due to a lack of confidence in the benefits of attendance. The VCYS need to be assured that their presence is not tokenistic but that their views will be taken into account and make an impact on decisions made. Capacity building needs to be supported by LAs to ensure that the VCYS is able to fully engage with local decision making. LAs also need to be proactive in identifying and inviting relevant members of the VCYS to events. Guidance needs to be given by central government to local government to implement the strategy and monitor investment in third sector providers. A bottom-up view of partnerships and

³ Rt Hon Beverley Hughes, Minister of State, speech to 4Children Conference, 2007. Full text available via: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/news/?asset=News&id=84324>

participation needs to be promoted to allow smaller voluntary youth organisations to be involved in all aspects of service provision.

VYS Devon Representation Project

In Devon a protocol was established between the voluntary sector and Devon County Council that was developed as a part of Capacity Builders through the Devon Consortium. It is a Representation Project led by VYS Devon and allows VCYS representative to claim expenses for attending meetings such as Devon Strategic Partnership Board, Children's Trust Executive and Stronger, Inclusive Communities Partnership.

5. Commissioning and funding

5.1 DCSF funding

Both the youth strategy and *The Children's Plan* highlight the importance of the third sector in the planning and delivery of support and services for young people, and funding for the VCYS is essential to enable full VCYS engagement. The allocation of the DCSF Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) grant is currently on-going and feedback from NCVYS members' has shown a disappointing number of organisations getting through to the second round. In particular the feedback indicates that faith based organisations stand out as being unsuccessful which seems to challenge central government's current emphasis on community cohesion, integration and tackling extremism. Many members have cited a lack of communication from DCSF around the initial deadline for bids and delays throughout the process. It is important that central government effectively communicates with the VCYS to ensure engagement within set timescales. Furthermore the delay in the CYPF grant allocation has made it difficult for some VCYS organisations to secure other funding sources.

5.2 Commissioning and youth infrastructure organisations

The strategy is extremely positive about the role of the third sector in delivering its vision but as highlighted in the *Frontline Hopscotch*⁴ report (NAVCA, 2007), the sector (particularly smaller local groups) is struggling to maintain its funding base in the new children trusts arrangements. Therefore local implementation and crucially how local government takes this forward in its multiple roles as commissioner, service provider and partnership facilitator will be the real litmus test for its success. The role of local voluntary sector infrastructure is an essential prerequisite for effective local

⁴ *Frontline Hopscotch* (NAVCA, 2007) is available via: <http://www.navca.org.uk/publications/hopscotch/>

representation for voluntary sector youth organisations. This has been verified by recent research carried out by NCVYS through VCYS Engage⁵.

There is concern among NCVYS members about the impact of the new commissioning arrangements for children's trusts on youth infrastructure organisations. Three Council for Voluntary Youth Services (CVYS) in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire region are particularly concerned about the following issues:

- many LAs are looking to develop a locality based system of commissioning which does not necessarily recognise the 'umbrella' role of a CVYS;
- funding streams are often available for targeted work – e.g. work with BME groups or drugs education and there is little funding available for support and developmental work provided by a CVYS;
- serious under funding of CVYSs is leading to overstretched and overworked staff; and
- backfill funding, where available, may be useful as money to the organisation but there is no way it can be used to bring in staff to cover.

5.3 Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill

The VCYS welcomes the announcement of the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts (formerly Unclaimed Assets) Bill and the focus on youth services. Local community based decisions around how to spend the money should ensure that the money is spent in the most beneficial way to young people and the community as a whole. There is a need to ensure that voluntary youth organisations can engage and attract funding for capital and it is hoped that the new Bill will lead to this happening in practice.

6. Positive activities for all – access and opportunities

6.1 Access and transport

The provision of positive activities is welcome however to be able to provide positive activities for all young people a diverse and responsive approach needs to be adopted. Different localities have different needs, for example the provision of positive activities in rural areas will be based on different requirements to that of an urban area. The funding that has gone into creating places to go has been well received by the VCYS, e.g. from the Youth Capital Fund, however there is great concern about a lack of focus on providing access to these places. In particular there are significant problems surrounding access to positive activities in rural areas and a

⁵ The Additional VCYS Capacity Building Needs Following Implementation of Youth Matters, Strategy Complete Ltd (Draft May 2007, to be officially published)

lack of emphasis on young people within DEFRA. Given the focus and development of cross-government department working NCVYS hopes that the DCSF will work with DEFRA to implement the ten year youth strategy. Furthermore NCVYS would be willing to provide any additional support and guidance necessary in the area of rural access to activities for young people.

6.2 Residentials

Different types of activities need to be considered in providing places to go and things to do for young people. Residentials are an excellent example of how the VCYS can work with young people who are often the most vulnerable young people in society. Residentials provide an environment which may be totally different to what a young person is used to, e.g. urban city centre to countryside, and allow participants to explore their feelings and views in a safe and secure environment. Safeguarding children and young people is of vital importance, however residentials are a good way of experiencing risk in a productive, educational and fun way.

Brathay Hall Trust and Lambeth Council – Brixton X-it From Weapon Use

After several weeks of regular sessions in conflict resolution in their own community, a group of teenagers from Brixton found themselves at Brathay Hall in the Lake District. This was the first time that many of them had left London and they remained at Brathay for one week, playing, walking, climbing and team-building. The group also explored their internal feelings, external influences and hopes for the future. The young people were challenged to set goals and encouraged to recognise what triggered their anger. It was a week of discovery, change and freedom facilitated by Brathay staff and Peer Mentors from Brixton. The Mentors had previously been through similar courses and now wanted to help develop other young people.

The course allowed the young people to grow as individuals, showed that they could live in harmony and identified potential Peer Mentors for future work in the Brixton community.

6.3 Young people's participation

The extension of the involvement of young people in deciding where money should be spent to provide positive activities through the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund is welcomed by the VCYS. However, we would like to have seen the process for involving young people in how resources are used locally taken forward further and faster.

Wherever possible, the views of children and young people should be sought and included in the planning and implementation of policies and procedures. This will not

only ensure that all places to go and things to do are responding to the needs and wants of young people, but also that organisations comply with *Article 3 and 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*⁶.

6.4 Discrimination of young people

At the Green Paper stage, the forthcoming Single Equality Bill (which is expected to be announced in the Queen's speech 2008), excluded people under 18 years of age. So effectively it would still be acceptable legislatively speaking for shop keepers to display signs saying 'only two school children at a time' or for bus drivers to act discriminatorily towards young people. This means that in essence the new discrimination law would be discriminatory. This causes concern as this would appear to be in direct opposition to Ministers' efforts to tackle negative stereotyping within the ten year youth strategy. Excluding young people under 18 from the discrimination legislation would seem to send out the message that it is 'okay' to discriminate against young people in this way which in turn contributes to young people's low sense of self worth, acts as a barrier to participation and perpetuates the negative stereotype that Ministers are supposedly fighting against. It is clear that the government needs to take a more holistic approach if it is going to solve the problem.

7. Transition to adulthood; what and when is it?

The VCYS is concerned about how 'adulthood' will be defined and when it will be. The age of 18 has recently been mentioned at a DCSF consultation event as the age that a young person goes through the transition to adulthood. There is concern within the VCYS that one set age for the transition to adulthood does not reflect the individual needs and speed of development experienced by young people. Young people grow up in very diverse environments and at different paces. Some young people are forced to take on a great deal of responsibility at a young age, for example children in care or young people who are carers. Therefore the concept of celebrating transition to adulthood is complex and it will be very difficult to establish a criteria for 'adulthood'. Residential activities are also a good way of demonstrating the importance of the amount of time it takes to break down barriers and build relationships with young people. Support needs to be in place for young people after they have completed residential to allow a young person's progression and development to continue. Young people should be encouraged to develop in their own time and achievements should be celebrated as and when they happen by those around that young person.

Clarification will be needed from DCSF on the cross-over between DCSF and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) responsibilities and how young people who are going through transition to adulthood will be supported by both departments.

⁶ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

8. The Youth Leadership Fund, National Institute for Youth Leadership and Centre for Excellence and Outcomes

8.1 Is the Youth Leadership Fund an accreditation scheme?

It is unclear from the strategy document what exactly the Youth Leadership Fund will entail and whether it will be based around an accreditation scheme for young people by gaining leadership skills and experience. If it will be an accreditation scheme how will outcomes be set and measured?

8.2 How will the National Institute for Youth Leadership work in practice?

Investment in the capacity building of third sector organisations with a track record in providing effective leadership development opportunities to young people is welcomed. However there is a need to focus on support for organisations that work with young people who are hard to reach as they often require specialist support and additional services.

8.3 Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (CfEO)

There is interest amongst the VCYS regarding the development of a Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services with regards to setup and implications for existing infrastructure and national bodies that are already established leads in youth services. The VCYS will await further developments as the CfEO progresses and begins work in July 2008.

9. Remember the volunteers!

We [Office of the Third Sector] estimated the economic value of formal volunteering at £38.9 (±2.5) billion.....it is clear that volunteering makes a significant contribution to England's economy.

Office of the Third Sector (2007)⁷

The focus on workforce development and providing a quality service is welcomed within the strategy. However there needs to be a better understanding of the needs of the volunteer led VCYS by central and local government to ensure that an effective service is being delivered by a skilled workforce. The invaluable work that volunteers contribute to youth service delivery, especially working with the most vulnerable

⁷ *Helping Out - A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving* (Cabinet Office, Office of the Third Sector, 2007). Available via: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Research_and_statistics/third_sector_research/helping_out.aspx

children and young people, needs to be supported and developed. The introduction of a common skills and training framework for those across all sectors who work with young people needs to be fully available and accessible by volunteers. This may involve the government providing funds for volunteers to attend training courses or make training available out of standard work hours so that volunteers are able to attend. The VCYS would be keen to work with government and other agencies to develop the position and support for volunteers. The development of volunteer programmes and support would be an ideal opportunity for LAs to engage with local voluntary organisations and promote partnership working.

10. Other points to note

10.1 Workforce development

NCVYS has been fully involved in providing the views of the sector to the DCSF with regards to the youth workforce reform programme plans, e.g. confidential scoping paper and working with the DCSF consultant. Therefore those views have not been repeated in this paper.

10.2 Extended schools and services

The introduction of extended schools and services is a clear opportunity for different sectors to work in partnership to provide services for young people. Extended schools are also highlighted in *The Children's Plan* however NCVYS would like to have seen documentation of the vital links between schools and the VCYS within the Plan. The VCYS recognises extended schools as an opportunity to engage with the provision of local services but in some cases there have not been good experiences of engagement with Local Authorities. For example some VCYS organisations are being charge by schools to use the school facilities out of school hours. The involvement of the VCYS also expands the concept to include other locations and facilities, not just schools as sites to provide services. This is important as many of the children and young people who will benefit most from out of school services are not attending school and may be put off attending if the activities is based in the school that they don't attend during the day. There is a danger of extended services becoming a missed opportunity for the VCYS, Local Authorities, schools and young people.

10.3 Public perception and media representation

The VCYS welcome the acknowledgement by the DCSF of the need to tackle issues around public perception of young people and the need to challenge negative stereotypes of young people that are reinforced by the media. Another challenge is getting some major institutions to change their general perceptions of young people and encourage a new era of positive appreciation for the contribution that young people can make in their communities and the development of society in general.

11. Conclusion

The VCYS welcomes *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities* and government's recognition of the crucial and unique difference that the VCYS can make in developing and delivering services for young people. There are many positive aspects of the strategy that promote young people's participation and empowerment, however the development of cross-government departmental working will be crucial in enabling the strategy to be implemented effectively. As will the need for central government to ensure that its strategy is effectively being put into practice at a local level and that the VCYS is actively engaged at every opportunity. Additionally, as highlighted in this report, further clarification is needed on some of the proposals within the strategy.

Following the youth strategy the launch of *The Children's Plan* and the Youth Taskforce should ensure that young people remain a priority within current policy developments. To reflect DCSF's recognition of the vital role of the VCYS and the aim of creating a more unified, integrated approach to planning and delivery services to young people, it is essential that DCSF communicates and engages consistently and effectively with the VCYS. This will help reinforce VCYS confidence in the DCSF and assist joint working throughout the sectors.

The funding and commissioning of services is critical to ensuring that the VCYS is fully supported and able to continue its work. As previously mentioned in this report there has been disappointment among some NCVYS members with regards to the CYPF Grant. NCVYS will continue to monitor its members' progress throughout the grant rounds and would be happy to feed back further findings to DCSF. NCVYS supports the expectations set out in *The Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007:147) for LAs 'to be creative in their place-shaping' and for children's trusts 'to look beyond direct local authority and other statutory service provision to a wide range of potential providers, in the voluntary and community sector'. To aid this process the VCYS recognises that it needs to play its part and be proactive with engagement with local and national government.

As highlighted communication is essential to policy development and service delivery and NCVYS would like to continue the mutually beneficial dialogue with DCSF that has already been established to ensure that the VCYS is fully engaged and has its voice heard throughout the strategy implementation process.