

Issues for the '90's

Policy and practice issues affecting youth workers

Outside four walls

Liam Kealy, Senior Development Officer with the Wales Youth Agency and responsible for youth empowerment, looks at some of the issues central to detached and outreach work.

Since the development of the Youth Service following the Albermarle Report in 1958, youth work has diversified the ways in which it delivers its provision to young people. Today, much of that delivery takes place outside the four walls of a youth club, or any building specially set aside for youth work.

One of the earliest examples of this 'detached' youth work was a YMCA project which ran a coffee stall on a London street corner in the 1950s and early 1960s. The stall offered a point of contact for young people who didn't use other services, and then worked with them to develop programmes suited to their needs. During three years of fieldwork, the coffee stall became the focal point for a wide range of activities and interventions.

Now, detached youth work is an established way of working with young people, although it is not that well developed in Wales.

One of the reasons for this may be a misunderstanding of the nature of detached youth work. For me, it is a method which takes resources and expertise right to the point of need. It empowers young people, because you work with them, on their agenda, at a pace they can determine and in settings they choose. Detached youth workers 'negotiate' the nature of the learning experiences they offer to young people.

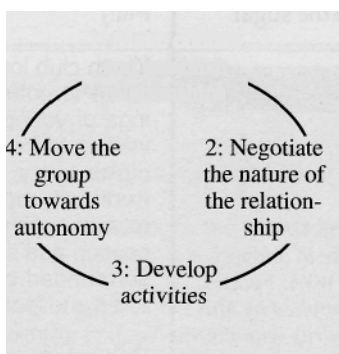
This does not mean working with young people in any way they choose. Rather, having established a relationship with a young person or group of young people, the worker develops learning activities which take account of the needs and aspira-

tions of the young person/group and the role of the worker.

Detached workers operate in a range of settings. Pubs, cafes, amusement arcades, street corners, bus stops are all places where young people gather and they all present opportunities for developing positive work.

A common misconception is that detached work precludes working in buildings. Having made contact with young people, workers often find that they need to use a building or room in a building to move their work on. It isn't easy, for example, to plan a weekend away or develop a discussion about sexist remarks while standing in a shop doorway with the rain lashing down. Historically, the motivation for detached youth work was a desire to work with young people who were themselves 'detached' from other forms of provision.

A group of youth workers in Caerphilly, Mid Glamorgan, has developed a detached work cycle:



1: Make contact and establish relationships

It is at the point where the youth worker is developing activities — which can be as diverse as helping to organise a camping trip to offering advice about benefits — that working indoors may be necessary. The ultimate aim is to enable young people to operate as autonomous individuals able to plan for and meet their own needs.

Another misunderstanding arises over what constitutes detached work and what characterises outreach work. For me, detached work is about making contact with young people and developing programmes around issues that concern or interest them. In the main it is young people who set the agenda.

Outreach work is concerned with taking issues identified by professionals and developing them with young people not normally reached by social, health or other services. For example, a number of health authorities employ outreach workers to promote safe practices among drug users, by making contact with them in their own settings.

Adult education has a long history of working in communities whose members would not ordinarily attend traditional adult education classes. The aim has been to establish learning opportunities based on the aspirations of potential clients. For example,

the Community Agencies established in Clwyd in the 1980s set up informal learning groups by going out into the community and finding out what sort of learning opportunities people wanted. Then groups were held at venues that people felt comfortable with.

Much of the work that has been established with young women looking after children has been developed by workers going out into the communities and setting up groups.

The nature of both detached and outreach work demands that interagency approaches be developed. The Youth Service has much to gain from working with other organisations. Much detached work practice involves social services, the health service, probation service and so on working with each other for the benefit of young people.

There are a number of detached and outreach projects established in Wales, funded in the main by Community Councils or the youth service. This bodes well for the future and they provide good models for other organisations to consider. If anyone would like further information please get in touch with me at the Wales Youth Agency.

Further reading

- '**Diversion from Offending — the Role of the Youth Service**', Graham & Smith. Published by Crime Concern
- '**Youth Crime Prevention: a Handbook of Good Practice**', Findlay, Bright & Gill. Crime Concern
- '**Recording and Reporting**', A Rogers, Youth Clubs UK
- '**Starting out in Detached Work**', A Rogers, Youth Clubs UK
- '**Creative Training**', Chelms & Redman, Youth Clubs UK
- '**Offbeat Detached Youth Work Project**', Offbeat
- '**Borderlines**', A & G Cox, National Youth Agency
- '**Consett Churches Detached Youth Project Annual Report 1992/93**', CCDYP
- '**Craigmillar Detached Youth Work Project**.' Annual Report 1984, 1986
- '**Detached Youth Work with Young Mothers**', Craigmillar DYWP
- '**Looking Beyond Street Level**', Youth Work Unit, NYA
- '**Mount Pleasant Detached Youth Project**', Annual Report 1988
- '**The Flat: Craigmillar Detached Youth Work Project 1987**'
- '**No Building No Power**' Various,
- '**Starting out in Detached Work**', A Rogers, Youth Clubs UK
- '**Street Mates**', J Wil, Merseyside Youth Association
- '**Streetwise '85 — Meadowell Detached Project**', S Barrington, A Manktelow, North Tyneside Borough Council
- '**Understanding Detached Work and Helping Others Manage It**', A Mountain, NYA
- '**Working with Unattached Youth**'. G W. Goetschius and M. J Tash, RKP
- '**The Management of Detached Work**', Arnold et al, Youth Clubs UK.

