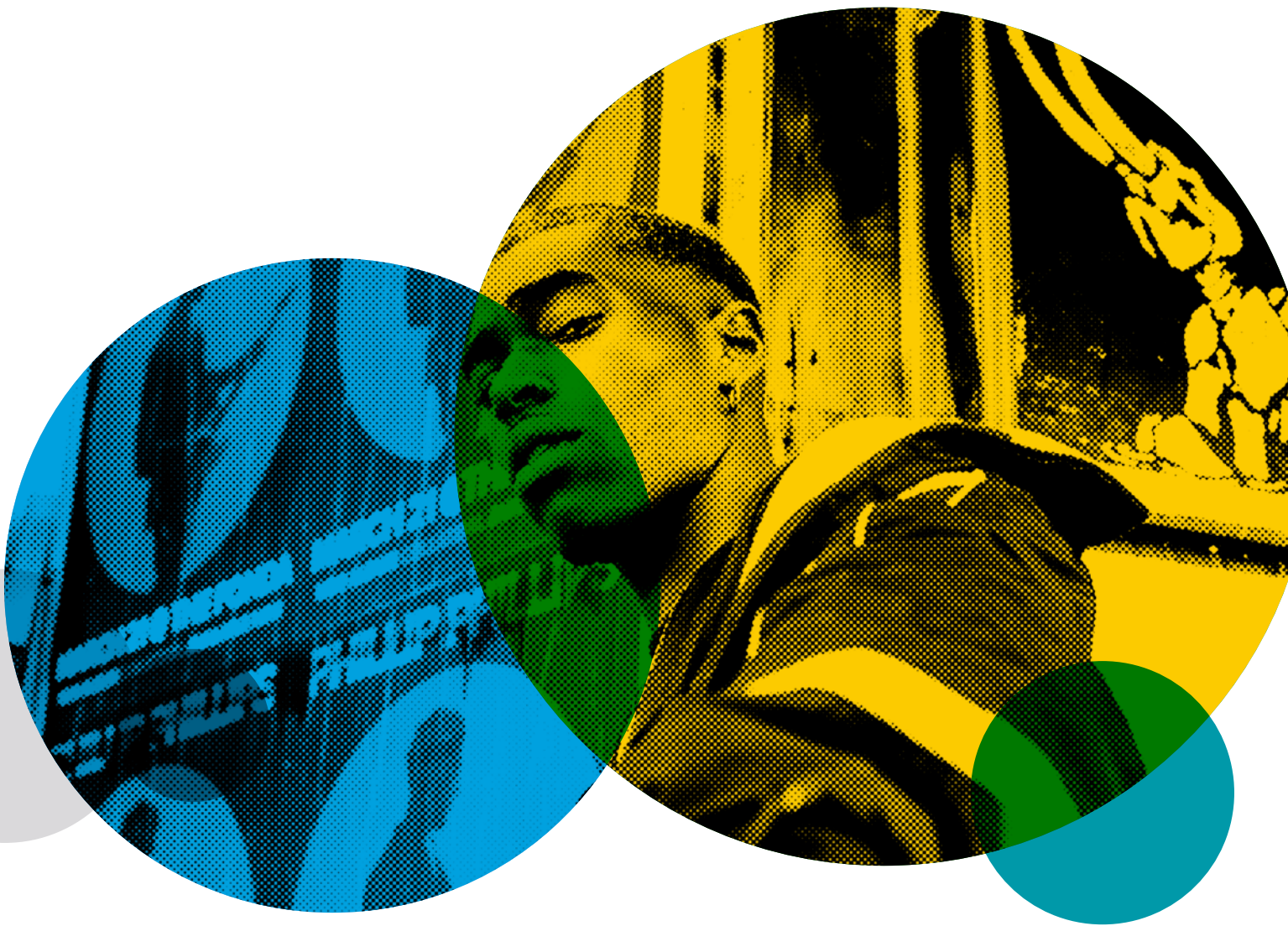


Common Protocols for Detached Youth Work in Manchester



[There is] “Little understanding of the practice of detached youth work among funders, commissioners, housing, and police etc. resulting in requests to do work that isn’t detached youth work.”



Contents

Message from the Detached Strategic Lead Steering Group (DSLSG)	4
Message from Young Manchester	6
Key points for consideration and discussion	7
Note: ‘detached’, ‘detached work’, and ‘detached youth work’	8
PART 1	9
National context	9
Detached youth work during COVID-19 lockdown	10
Manchester context	11
The need for protocols: Born of frustration — a flawed logic	13
PART 2	15
Protocols: An introductory statement	15
Protocol 1: The language of detached youth work: Meanings and values	16
What does the term ‘detached youth work’ actually mean?	17
Protocol 2: The critical importance of trust-based relationships	18
Protocol 3: Practices that respect and enhance autonomy	19
Protocol 4: Investing in time: The need for ‘temporally-appreciative’ detached youth work	20
Protocol 5: Reconnaissance: Preparing and learning	21
Protocol 6: Detached youth work and community development	22
Protocol 7: Safeguarding and safe-working	23
Protocol 8: Anti-oppressive practice	24
Protocol 9: Workforce development	24
Protocol 10: Support systems	26
Protocol 11: Resources	27
Protocol 12: Reporting, monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance	28
Protocol 13: Management	30
Protocol 14: Governance and the need for a strategic body	32
Where next?	33
About the author	34
Appendix	35

Message from the Detached Strategic Lead Steering Group (DSLSG)



This report has its origin in Young Manchester's belief that the development of high-quality detached youth work is essential to achieving its vision for excellent youth work across the city.

In 2018, Young Manchester funded a 'Strategic Lead for Detached Youth Work' for the period 2019-2022 to help meet the needs of detached youth workers. A critical element of this role has been to explore the perception that detached youth work is employed as a short-term 'fix' in response to concerns about young people's anti-social behaviour and a series of tragic violent incidents involving young people.

This report documents research done to examine these and other detached youth work-related issues. We want to resist directing particular readers to specific sections, as we believe all protocols are relevant to all stakeholders, whether detached youth workers, managers, funders or commissioners. Given many of the protocols are inter-connected and mutually-reinforcing, we very much hope the report will be read in its entirety. Instead, we have summarised our key points for consideration and discussion, both when engaging in detached youth work and when considering beginning, funding or commissioning new work. We hope you find the protocols stimulating and helpful in extending your curiosity about this unique practice.

Thanks go to Young Manchester for their investment in the research that informed this report and to Graeme Tiffany for his dedication to a collaborative research process and his careful writing up of findings into this report. We are confident engagement with its findings will help a wide range of stakeholders better understand and support the practice and management of detached youth work and inform decisions about funding, commissioning and partnership work. Thanks also go to Manchester City Council who have continued Young Manchester's legacy in funding the Detached Strategic Lead role for a further year, 2022-23.

Finally, I'd like to thank the members of the Detached Strategic Lead Steering Group: in particular Chris Macintosh, for his wisdom in shaping this process and this report, and to the group members for their time and energy in reflecting on our practice and experiences in Manchester, their commitment to this process, their support of me, and for their vision for and commitment to all that high-quality, collaborative detached youth work can and does achieve for Manchester's young people.

Helen Gatenby

Manager, M13 Youth Project, on behalf of the Detached Strategic Lead Steering Group

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| Message from Young Manchester



I am so delighted to see the protocols for detached youth work launched, a key output from the strategic leadership on detached work driven by leaders and experienced practitioners across the non-profit youth and play sector in Manchester.

Young Manchester wants all children and young people in the city to have access to high quality youth and play work, and it's clear that for many children and young people, this can't be achieved in centre-based settings, however informal. We need to meet children and young people where they are at — including in the most practical sense of the phrase, oftentimes in the street, park and public spaces. Conducting work outside of centre-based settings presents practice challenges for workers — and codifying this is vital to supporting practice. So this document includes protocols for workers to support this and encourages us into collective conversation about what detached work 'is' and the beneficial outcomes for young people and communities that workers and young people can achieve together.

There are also important messages for funders and other stakeholders — too often detached youth work is seen as a tool for policing children and young people, keeping the streets 'safe' and solving anti-social behaviour. Experience tells us that this framework isn't particularly helpful and not in step with youth work values and practice.

If used well, these protocols should help all of those with a stake in children and young people and communities in Manchester to build ways of working in detached youth work that help us all to play our part in supporting all children and young people.

I thank all of the youth workers, managers, community organisations and other contributors to this document and especially to Graeme Tiffany for facilitating the process. Finally, and with admiration, I thank Dr Helen Gatenby, who has been a consistent and persistent force for supporting colleagues across the sector to strengthen their practice.

Imogen Gregg-Auriac

Interim CEO, Young Manchester

| Key points for consideration and discussion

The theory and practice of detached youth work needs to be better understood by all stakeholders. Detached youth workers, managers, funders, commissioners, representatives of partner agencies and policy-makers must work together to secure a shared understanding and mutual appreciation of the opportunities and limitations of working with young people in public space.

Finding the time to discuss, explore and learn about the distinct processes associated with detached youth work is essential to understanding the conditions needed for effective practice and the contributions all can make to securing good outcomes. Central to this is becoming aware of the time and expertise required to deliver high-quality detached youth work that has lasting benefits for young people and the recognition of the critical importance of trust-based relationships to this process.

The work needs to be properly resourced over extended periods of time; the practice has suffered greatly from 'short-termism': projects should work for a minimum of 18 months, ideally 3-years or longer. Indeed, the more enduring the investment in detached youth work, the greater the opportunity for participatory youth work, where young people are substantively involved in decision-making. This is considered both a right and essential to good and effective practice. This right extends to having a say about what information about them can be shared.

Participation should also extend to monitoring and evaluation regimes. This will ensure detached youth work better serves young people's needs and prioritises benefit to them. This requires a shift from the current emphasis on measurement to a system that values quality interventions above numbers of young people contacted and worked with.

Detached youth workers need to be well trained and have opportunities for continuous professional development and learning. Workers need time and resources for reconnaissance (a period of time where they can learn about the community and the young people within it). Equally, they should be supported in the essential work of networking, recording, monitoring, evaluation, reflection, and other mechanisms that support practice development. Above all, they need the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, such as providing 'one-to-one' support and accompaniment for young people who need additional bespoke help. This further implies flexible working hours.

The management of detached youth work requires a clear understanding of the theory and practice of the work, a context-appreciative approach, and an approach that is fluid, dynamic and participative. Managers need to create learning environments that support the development of their staff as well as manage the expectations of external stakeholders.

We recommend that a strategic body be established that takes responsibility for determining and framing commissioning arrangements in relation to detached youth work. This body would comprise senior detached youth workers, managers of organisations who deliver detached youth work, commissioners and funders and use these protocols as a guide for its work.

Note: 'detached', 'detached work', and 'detached youth work'

Historically, the term 'detached' emerged in response to a growing realisation that many descriptions of young people identified them as 'in deficit'. In the 1960s and 70s, for example, some young people were routinely referred to as 'the unattached'.

In an effort to resist this deficit orientation, and to demonstrate to young people a separateness from the institutional structures they sometimes perceived as oppressive, workers started to refer to themselves as 'detached' – from those institutions. Workers' presence in non-institutional settings (particularly public space) and desire to contact and initiate relationships with young people in these neutral spaces – spaces where young people chose to be – also demonstrates their commitment to working 'where young people are at'.

From this we get the wider concept of 'detached work', which encompasses others working in public space, including with the homeless and those sleeping on the streets. And ultimately, 'detached youth work', youth workers whose practice is 'detached'.

Further clarification emerges from the distinction between street-based youth work and detached youth work. As the former implies, this is a practice that takes place entirely in the street. Being 'detached' offers more flexibility; detached youth workers can be found working in a range of other settings. Some of these are in buildings, like cafés, that function in a non-institutional manner i.e. there are few (usually no) expectations and few (usually no) constraints to accessing these spaces. Of the examples drawn to our attention, we also heard of detached youth work taking place in a library, which, again, tend to be places where there are few expectations and few constraints to access.

| Part 01

National context

There has never been a better time to develop protocols for the use of detached youth work; the pandemic thrust detached work into plain sight as workers participated in and often initiated a range of measures designed to support young people and wider communities. Local people, service providers and policy-makers came to value detached youth work as never before, so much so that detached youth work was accorded 'key-worker' status.

During 'lockdown', youth services recognised detached youth work was pretty much 'the only game in town' if contact was to be maintained with young people. Digital youth work had some success, but only detached work was able to provide a 'presence'-based service.

Often for the first time in their careers, youth workers used to working in building-based settings gained experience of working 'outside', as their workplaces were closed due to Coronavirus regulations. This experience taught them about the complexities of working in public space and helped them appreciate that working 'outside' is a multi-faceted concept.

Certainly, working 'outside' is widely understood to mean being present in physical, typically outdoor, settings. But it is rare that those interested in detached work fully appreciate the complexities of 'public space work'. Put simply, public space functions very differently from the spaces demarcated by the walls of buildings. Walls fundamentally shape and define what goes on and what's possible.

detached work transcends boundaries: it is a practice 'without walls'

In contrast, effective public space work is much more fluid, malleable, and reliant on negotiation.

Detached work transcends boundaries: it is a practice 'without walls'. We find that, in the absence of walls, spaces function informally; little if anything can be made compulsory. This is a world of difference from school. 'School' infers formality, and confers a compulsory context that is much more rigid than 'outside'. And the same can be said of the many other institutional spaces where other services reside. Crucially, this formality, this sense of compulsion, this feeling of institutional demand, lies at the heart of why so many services are struggling to engage young people; young people experience this as a barrier. Removing these barriers is central to the rationale behind detached youth work.

power, authority and control work differently in public space

Power, authority and control work differently in public space. Working 'outside' demands that the power, authority and control so often associated with building-based settings is re-imagined, conceived of differently. Fundamentally, what happens is determined by those present, particularly young people and the detached youth workers working with them. Understanding this is critical to understanding detached youth work and helps clarify to other stakeholders that any aspirations they might have to assert what happens in these spaces are unreasonable. Rather, they need to be part of the wider dialogue that these protocols propose, wherein young people's voices can be heard and have influence.

Working 'outside' then is both philosophy and practice; it demands 'praxis' — the fusion of theory and practice, of reflection and action. As becomes apparent, it is strongly influenced by both geographical and democratic thinking, where the agency and autonomy of young people (often manifest in their movements) is not just accepted as a matter of fact, but also respected, encouraged, celebrated and 'worked with'.

Detached youth work during COVID-19 lockdown

The detail of what happened under 'lockdown' is informative too. Detached youth workers fielded the demands of the police and councils to engage young people considered to be flouting Coronavirus regulations. Most detached youth workers tended to 'push back', asserting the realities of public space work and the need for conversation-based interventions. They sought a respect for the dialogical aspects of detached youth work as an educational practice; detached youth work is not about policing young people's behaviour, nor is it about instructing them to behave in particular ways. Rather, detached youth workers are there to inform young people and encourage them to think critically about the decisions they make, whether in relation to COVID-19 or anything else.

Other agencies looked for support in achieving their aims and many came to realise the value of detached youth work, perhaps for the first time. In turn, detached youth workers were able to contribute to wider systems of community support and facilitate young people's and families' access to a range of services, many of whom had struggled to contact and engage service-users during lockdown.

Significantly, detached youth work was made more visible, certainly compared with pre-pandemic times, when policy had influenced targeted, individuated practices, so often unseen and unrecognised by wider communities.

While much has 'gone back to normal', a values legacy remains; a whole range of stakeholders now know more about the contribution detached youth work can make both to the lives of young people and to wider communities — and increasingly value this contribution.

Inevitably, there is much more to be done in consolidating the legacy of COVID-19, in promoting a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what detached youth work is, and how it works, as well as the benefits it can bring. This is vital work; detached youth work has long suffered from a range of misunderstandings, particularly in terms of what can be reasonably expected of it.

the future of detached youth work depends on all involved having a good grasp of the concept of detached youth work

Ultimately, the future of detached youth work depends on all involved having a good grasp of the concept of detached youth work and the rationale that underpins it; the way it works — its processes — are just as important as its outcomes. As has become clear in recent times, it is precisely because of a commitment to these youth work processes that positive outcomes are achievable. The task now is to translate the applause that detached youth work has received into a positive future for this unique practice. These protocols can, we hope, help to secure this worthy aim.

Manchester context

The origins of these ‘protocols’ can be traced back to 2018 (pre-COVID). A funding call invited ‘experts in detached youth work’ from the voluntary sector (Manchester’s statutory youth service had been disestablished in 2010) to deliver a six-month piece of work in response to statutory concerns about ‘youth violence’ in specific parts of the city. It became clear that the various stakeholders in the work — young people, detached youth workers, managers, funders and statutory partners such as councillors, police and Local Area Teams — had significantly different expectations of the work and what was possible within six months. As a result, in mid-2019 Young Manchester (brokers of the funder/deliverer relationship) decided to invest in a ‘Strategic Lead’ for Detached Youth Work to support the understanding and development of quality detached youth work in Manchester. They commissioned M13 Youth Project, an experienced detached youth work project in the city, to undertake this role. M13 convened a steering group of experienced detached youth workers who met monthly (from July 2019 to March 2020), to discuss experiences of detached youth work and reflect on the issues relating to short-term pieces of commissioned work. A simple description of the process of detached youth work and its potential to help others better understand the practice was devised. Training in detached youth work, advice and strategic support was offered. Further ‘Strategic Lead’ investment was provided by Young Manchester until 2022. COVID-19 brought further demands for the work of this group. The group continued to meet regularly, offered support, guidance and training to those not used to working outside, developed policy and provided strategic support across the city.

The idea for protocols grew out of conversations within the Steering Group and with others in Manchester with interests in detached youth work. In 2021, we invited Graeme Tiffany to work with us to develop ‘Common Protocols’ that workers, managers, funders, commissioners and partners would commit to. This report documents this process and its outcomes.

The realities of detached youth work in the city of Manchester (the area this project is concerned with) are important to note. Of particular significance here is the absence of a statutory youth service, as compared with other areas in Greater Manchester, where many local authorities directly employ significant numbers of youth workers. As such, a wide range of voluntary sector providers dominate the detached youth work landscape. Our research suggests this voluntary status confers a greater level of freedom compared with that experienced by statutory services, who often describe being subject to multiple layers of bureaucracy and an increased demand to work to pre-specified policy agendas.

**the various stakeholders
had significantly different
expectations of what was
possible**

The general applicability of these protocols to statutory settings should be considered in this context. We hope, though, that the themes we have identified constitute useful stimuli for thinking and the type of dialogue that proved so fruitful in generating what we have arrived at.

This process has also made clearer a whole series of issues that affect youth work generally; we hope these protocols help inform a wider debate both in youth work and in the wider world of work with young people, wherever, and in whatever context, that work is taking place. As such, we do not offer these protocols in definitive terms. We are keen instead to communicate the importance of undertaking a process that can help create protocols with local relevance and which are appreciative of local contexts. Indeed, the applicability of these protocols should, we suggest, be subject to the kind of participatory research that has informed these protocols and include conversations between workers from statutory and voluntary sector contexts.

The need for protocols: Born of frustration — a flawed logic

It may be unconventional to say that a project is ‘born of frustration’, but this is a reasonable description of the experiences of detached youth workers in Manchester in recent years. Some of these frustrations are general, national and historical; in particular the effects of an era of austerity that saw 1000s¹ of youth workers lose their jobs across the country, which led to an inevitable reduction in the reach and level of youth services. Other frustrations are more specific to detached youth work and to Manchester, particularly the policy drivers that increasingly direct detached youth workers to ‘target’ particular young people and to do so within the constraints of short-term contracts. The primary logic for ‘targeting’ strategies, it seems, is ‘resources are limited so we need to get them to those who need them most’.

While this is a compelling and seductive narrative, detached youth workers argue that this logic is based on three flawed assumptions and makes little sense as a starting point for detached youth work. The first flawed assumption is that the need for resource constraint is unquestionable; the second, that those with the greatest needs are easily identifiable (that a system capable of determining who they are exists and is effective); and thirdly, that success in engaging and working with these young people is considered, in the minds of many, a foregone conclusion.

These assumptions all contradict the experiences of detached youth workers. Intriguingly, COVID-19 disrupted this logic; the response to the pandemic generated new resources to undertake detached work, and these resources were deployed in ‘universal’ rather than ‘targeted’ ways, in support of wider communities. It may

be that responses to COVID-19 challenged the presumed value of targeting to such a degree that youth work was (and might be in the future) re-imagined as a community-based practice.²

We might also note that post-COVID analysis³ suggests c. 450,000 young people are now ‘not known to services’, including c. 100,000 ‘ghost pupils’ (those who have not returned to school since they re-opened). This too suggests that community-based services are very much needed, given their capacity to reach out to young people wherever they are.

The longer-term experience of detached workers is of being subject to a range of expectations typically associated with social problems. Foremost is the issue of ‘anti-social behaviour’ and ‘street nuisance’, although knife crime and drug and alcohol misuse are often also added to a seemingly endless list of ‘problems to be solved’. Here again, we see the significance of diverse conceptualisations of detached youth work, particularly among non-youth work (often ‘partner’) agencies who often view the practice as capable of ‘fixing things’ (or, more sympathetically, preventing these problems). The practice is interpreted as a means to an end, rather than a process — a process fundamentally informed, shaped and co-created by young people with the support of detached youth workers. The danger here is that this reductive interpretation simply adds grist to the pervasive narrative of ‘youth’ as a societal problem in need of such ‘fixing’, or policing, as the case may be. Detached youth workers fundamentally reject this; certainly there may be young people with problems, but to identify young people as problems per se is to dehumanise and de-value them. It is a deficit-oriented position at odds with the very essence of youth work, which views young people as assets in their communities.

1 c. 35,000 according to Bernard Davies ‘A review of ‘youth services’: government promises – and their limitations’, April 6th, 2022, <https://youthworkslivinghistory.com/author/bernarddavies19/>

2 Tiffany, G. (2022) COVID-19 as a potentially valuable disruptive force in the conceptualisation of Street-based Youth Work, *Youth & Policy*, 28th January 2022, <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/covid19-as-a-potentially-valuable-disruptive/>

3 Ditto Footnote 1.

the crux of the matter appears to lie in how detached youth work is conceptualised

We are left then with, at best, a culture of rescue; at worst a creeping authoritarianism evidenced, for example, in the language of ‘positive activities for young people’, where what’s ‘positive’ is implicitly determined by adults, and independent of conversations with young people. This undermines the principled stance that ‘youth work’ demands ‘working with’ (rather than ‘doing to’) young people.

To repeat, the crux of the matter appears to lie in how detached youth work is conceptualised; in recent years it has come to epitomise a ‘floating concept’ — often understood very differently by different stakeholders. Each seems to view the practice in ways that suit their particular interests and the particular outcomes they wish to see detached youth workers ‘deliver’. Fundamentally, defining ‘detached youth work’ (just as with ‘youth in society’) has become a site of contested values.

This notion of ‘contested’ is used purposefully; the work we have done demonstrates unequivocally that there is not just an extraordinary range of understandings as to what detached youth work is, but also a very real struggle among stakeholders to influence the agendas that detached workers work to. Workers fear greatly the marginalisation of young people’s voices, such that their practice becomes more a case of ‘doing to’ rather than ‘working with’ young people – which many regard as the principal defining feature of detached youth work.

These protocols assert the need for the widest possible conversation about meanings and values. The question must not be the reductionist ‘what is detached youth work for?’ but ‘what is detached youth work?’.



“Whose needs are we meeting – young people’s, funders or those of other agencies? Whose needs are prioritised?”



| Part 02

Protocols: An introductory statement

Why protocols?

First we must ask: why ‘protocols’? We take protocols to mean a form of documentation that has some authority and which conveys a series of commitments that all stakeholders subscribe to, particularly in relation to governance and decision-making.

However, we want to resist protocols that are highly prescriptive, which is why many of the protocols arrived at are process-oriented. They are designed to encourage all stakeholders to invest in a process of decision-making that reflects youth work’s commitment to participation⁴ – the principled stance that where decisions affect young people, those young people have a right to be involved in making those decisions.

How the protocols were developed

Between May 2021 and March 2022, a series of research activities led by Graeme Tiffany was organised with a range of stakeholder groups. Initially, a presentation was made to a city-wide meeting of detached youth workers to discuss ideas for the research. Thereafter, the Detached Strategic Lead Steering Group (DSLSSG) considered and agreed upon a schema. This included initial research activities with the DSLSSG and a specific piece of work focused on ‘Learning from COVID’, which explored detached youth workers’ experience of working during the pandemic and particularly when ‘lockdown’ regulations existed. The outcomes of each activity were documented and used as a stimulus for thinking at subsequent meetings, each time imagining and re-imagining relevant protocols, as part of an evolutionary process to test and clarify ideas as the project developed.

There was a particular desire to ensure what had been learnt during this time constituted a useful legacy that could support the development of detached youth work in the future.

This work informed the methodology for a further city-wide meeting. A wider community of detached youth workers, managers and other stakeholders participated in dialogue groups and workshops designed to explore the meaning and value of detached youth work and make recommendations for improving practice.

The outcomes of this event were documented and, again, used to inform the methodology used at an event specifically for managers, who continued to refine the protocols. Final iterations of the protocols were worked on by a sub-group of the DSLSSG.

The process used to develop the protocols was highly participative. Methods included dialogue groups, philosophical enquiry, concept maps, and evaluation exercises, focused on three simple but important questions about participants’ experience of detached youth work: what’s good; what’s not; and what needs to change?

These activities generated a considerable amount of data. We looked for themes within the data, and these helped to identify consensus positions on what protocols would be useful. The data also included many individual ‘outlier’ comments. We want to value these comments as potential further stimuli for thinking critically, differently and in innovative ways about detached youth work (see ‘Where next?’).

A note: particular words are highlighted in bold. The aim here is to draw attention to the crucial inter-relatedness of many of the protocols and support cross-referencing; it will be in the synthesis of these protocols that the greatest gains are most likely.

4 See also footnote 6

→ Protocol 1

The language of detached youth work: Meanings and values

This protocol is deliberately placed first and foremost, made central to the Common Protocols. Indeed, issues related to the meanings and values we attach to ‘The language of detached youth work’ are judged the crux of the matter such that the greatest priority must be given to defining and securing a shared understanding of what ‘detached youth work’ is. The challenge here is great; particularly as detached youth work has long since suffered a “confused” identity (Arnold et al., 1981)⁵. This may explain a general lack of confidence within the detached youth work community in articulating what detached youth work is and the values that underpin it. It is hoped these protocols support a greater confidence to do this.

These questions are especially important in defining detached youth work, given its highly contested nature. Indeed, some participants spoke of the “chaotic language of values” associated with detached work and the lack of a “united front”.

These earlier remarks also allude to the perceived ‘instrumentalisation’ of detached youth work, where the practice is viewed and valued as an ‘instrument’, a tool, for achieving particular tasks. Indeed, it becomes clearer that the question of ‘what detached youth work is for’ often drowns out the question of what it is.

In this way the ends, or ‘impact’ and ‘outcomes’, become the focus of attention, rather than additionally considering the processes and methods that also generate benefit for young people. Typically, those responding to the question ‘what is detached youth work?’ refer to the things they have done⁶ as detached youth workers (such as the organisation of activities and workshops) rather than the processes and methods that give rise to these activities. In effect, they are identifying the tangible aspects of their work. Outcomes are important but can contribute to a purely ends-related understanding of detached youth work, which fails to explain how important values such as voluntary association and participation are in informing practice. A further consequence is that wider stakeholders (like funders and commissioners) often have in mind a concept of detached youth work that lacks appreciation of the complex relationship between values-informed processes and good outcomes.

In sum, the Manchester experience (as with Williams and Richardson’s research — see footnote 4) reveals no common or united language of values, just regular and frequent references to fragmented conversations about values, born of little time or encouragement to invest in an enquiry into these values.

These protocols view this as a tangible problem, and assert the need for a process where all those involved in detached youth work (whether practitioners, managers, representatives of partner agencies, commissioners or funders) participate in a regular dialogue about the meaning and value of detached youth work, aimed at securing shared understandings. Such a consensus is foundational to effective decision-making, which in turn is crucial to good practice. These protocols seek to address this problem. But first, some unpacking is needed.

5 Arnold, J., Askins, D., Davies, R., Evans, S., Rogers, A. & Taylor, T. (1981) *The Management of Detached Youth Work; How and Why*. Leicester: Youth Clubs UK.

6 The recent work of Simon Williams (University of Derby) and Ruth Richardson (Institute of Youth Work) into youth work values is illustrative here. When asked to articulate these values, youth workers refer to the often extraordinary number of things they do. The researchers also catalogued references to more than 70 ‘skills’ and nearly as many (c. 50) ‘attributes’ (articulated as ‘unteachable’ things) viewed as important traits needed by youth workers. The research demonstrates the multiplicity of different views about what youth work is and the values that inform it. It notes also the lack of a concerted attempt nationally to explore, clarify and achieve consensus as to what these values are, and their significance for practice. Rather, the most common reference point is ‘Ethical Conduct in Youth Work: a statement of values and principles from The National Youth Agency (2004): https://static.nya.org.uk/static/4824723ae8719d1f67c7519f55837ac2/Ethical_conduct_in_Youth-Work-1.pdf. Other references include the Institute of Youth Work’s Code of Ethics (<https://iyw.org.uk/code-of-ethics/>). The fact that statutory services often possess different values narratives to those identified by the voluntary sector only adds to the confusion. We might at least conclude that it is deeply problematic to define youth work purely on the basis of the activities young people engage in. Williams and Richardson also describe accounts of ‘working with values’, wherein youth workers speak of “values as a driving force”; “upholding values” [one might imagine the weight of the world on the youth worker’s shoulders]; “underpinning values”; “striving for values”, and “working toward values”. It’s as if youth workers experience a daily struggle to articulate a consistent value base. We hope these protocols go some way to clarifying these values, particularly those essential to detached youth work.

What does the term 'detached youth work' actually mean?

The research, first and foremost, was designed to create the time and space needed to make an enquiry into values possible. Asking – simplistically – ‘what’s good about detached youth work?’ and ‘what’s not?’ and later (having reflected on the responses to these questions) ‘what needs to change?’ created a climate of confidence, and made possible a critical and collaborative exploration of values.

A range of values was identified and expressed; and some key themes emerged. We heard often of the ‘preventative’ potential of detached work, for example in preventing young people’s involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour, and much was said about ‘support’ e.g. in helping young people who were struggling at school. However, what the participants in this project unanimously said was that youth work needed to be understood in appreciative terms; they asserted a principled (values-based) stance whereby young people were viewed as assets in their communities. This strengths-based position was seen as in tension with a focus on prevention, which tended to assume the likelihood of negative futures. ‘Stopping something’ was considered at odds with the very essence of education, which, for youth workers, seeks to encourage (and actively help) young people to participate in acts of creation: doing, making, and engaging in experiences that support their own flourishing and that of the communities they are a part of.

What emerges from the workshops is that detached youth workers value youth work as much for its processes, as any kind of ‘product’ it generates; they speak of the things that young people learn through their experiences, and especially those experiences that are participative i.e. where young people have been involved in decision-making. The commentary often refers to a particular ‘approach’, rather than anything systematised; an approach underpinned by methods and pedagogies and (crucially in detached work) methods that are fluid and responsive to ‘the where and the when’.

It is clear also from the comments made that in detached youth work ‘geography matters’: that the work must be informed by an understanding of space and place, and of young people’s mobilities. The same can be said of time; the practice needs to be **‘temporally-appreciative’**.

“The power dynamics are different on streets and in communities compared with in buildings – young people have more power, workers have to work harder to engage them, but this is good for relationships.”

the greatest priority must be given to defining and securing a shared understanding of what ‘detached youth work’ is

→ Protocol 2

The critical importance of trust-based relationships

A further theme emerging from the participatory workshops relates to multiple comments about ‘what works?’ in detached youth work. We found workers often adopted a ‘pragmatic approach’ to their work with young people; they have learnt, often through bitter experience, that some strategies work and others do not when working with young people in public space, and this has informed their on-going practice. Front and centre is the realisation that anything they do that young people perceive as coercive or manipulative will, quite simply, undermine relationships. It is clear then that detached youth work is a relational practice reliant on trust; where this trust is absent, young people will simply walk away. The confusion identified earlier is rooted in the failure to observe this simple fact; to assume detached youth workers can secure positive relationships by virtue of their mere presence is a fundamental misreading of the practice. Trust-based relationships can take significant amounts of time to secure, and this is especially so with regard to young people experiencing marginalisation and social exclusion who are often the very young people detached youth work ‘has an eye for’.

The testimony and experience of detached youth workers echoes the mainstream literature on working with socially excluded young people (Crimmens et al.⁷). This describes how some young people have a far greater experience of coercion than others, which leads to a resistance to commit to relationships. Detached workers learn that the effective engagement of socially excluded young people demands and relies upon a commitment to removing as many of the barriers to that engagement as possible, whether rooted in perception or reality.

This is termed ‘Low Threshold practice’ (Dynamo International⁸); as much as possible needs to be done to ensure the services that workers aim to provide are as accessible as possible.

Ultimately, the geography of the street and other public spaces dictates an approach based on a recognition that young people are, in effect, ‘in charge’; they have freedom to move, and the power to decide to be present, or not (as the case may be). So, detached workers avoid – at all cost – any kind of intervention that might be interpreted as coercive. Instead, they employ ‘democratic’ strategies, which emphasise listening, conversation, questioning, dialogue, empathy, and respect for young people’s agency and autonomy. Put another way, achieving positive outcomes relies on the existence of trust-based relationships which, in turn, rely on respectful engagement strategies. This means that the ‘pragmatic’ approach alluded to here is highly value-based. This, in turn, informs the need for **practices that respect and enhance autonomy**.

detached youth work is a relational practice reliant on trust - anything workers do that young people perceive as coercive or manipulative will undermine this trust

7 Crimmens, D., Factor, F., Jeffs, T., Pitts, J., Pugh, C., Spence, J., and Turner, P. (2004) Reaching socially excluded young people: A national study of street-based youth work. Leicester: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

8 Dynamo International (The International Network of Social Street workers) (2009) International Guide on the methodology of street work throughout the world. Brussels: Dynamo International.

→ Protocol 3

Practices that respect and enhance autonomy

The conceptual analysis above makes it clear that detached youth work relies for its success on working in a values-informed and democratic⁹ way, if it is to work at all. This protocol aims to secure this success by promoting respect for this way of working and protecting the practice from a culture of expectations that risk this approach.

detached youth work relies for its success on working in a values-informed and democratic way

Of the many expectations identified by the detached youth workers who participated in this project, one dominated their commentary. This was the demand placed on detached youth workers to achieve a range of outcomes determined prior to contact with young people, often referred to as ‘prescribed outcomes’, in the sense of being pre-scribed, i.e. written in advance. These expectations appear rooted in the misplaced assumption that workers’ mere presence is enough to secure these outcomes; this is not the case: in detached youth work there are no foregone conclusions.

It is here that the need for the **language** protocol becomes obvious, as well as an approach that values the interconnectedness of the protocols. Without this, common misconceptions about ‘what detached youth work is’ will only continue.

Practices that respect and enhance autonomy are rooted in the relational and process-oriented ‘pragmatism’ identified earlier; these practices knowingly and willingly engage with uncertainty, including uncertainty of outcome.

Here we might say ‘autonomy’ is a ‘social practice’, it is just as much a social concept as one associated with individuals. This implies that the agency and self-determination associated with autonomy emerges through interactions with others, especially detached youth workers – provided, that is, those workers are working in autonomy-enhancing ways. These approaches encourage and support young people to take control of their lives and these approaches also contribute to circumstances that enable others to do the same.

Other problematic expectations include demographic ‘targeting’ – the demand to work with some young people rather than others. Once again, we find a flawed logic; if engagement with young people per se can’t be presumed, it certainly can’t be assumed in relation to specific young people. As a consequence, ‘caseload’-oriented practices must be avoided; they are the stuff of social work, not youth work.

Geographical targeting can however make sense; certainly detached workers report a greater confidence in the effectiveness of their work when it is **community development**-oriented. It becomes reasonable then to focus on particular areas and communities of interest, provided, that is, **reconnaissance** reveals the need for detached youth work and its likely success as a form of intervention in these areas and neighbourhoods. Such reconnaissance is likely to reveal indicators of socio-economic disadvantage which (given synergies with current policy agendas¹⁰) may also help managers identify potential funding regimes.

⁹ Here the concept of democracy is articulated in a Deweyan sense; it was John Dewey that viewed democracy as ‘a mode of associated living’, reliant on the everyday engagement, discussion and dialogue of people in communities (Dewey, J. (1916/2008) *Democracy and Education*, New York: Macmillan). We might go further in stating that ‘participation’ is a defining principle in youth work. This too needs some clarification; we are keen to escape from a ‘thin’ definition of the word (where participation implies merely ‘taking part’) and instead advance a ‘thick’ definition, where participation is “The principle that those who will be substantially affected by decisions made by social and political institutions must be involved in the making of those decisions.” (EEC, as quoted in Bullock, A., Stallybrass, O. & Trombley, S. (eds.) (1977) *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, London: Fontana Press, p. 458.). Equally, theories that assert the value of ‘representativeness’ (as distinct from ‘representation’ and representative models) and ‘participatory democracy’ resonate also.

¹⁰ The DCMS ‘Levelling Up’ white paper commits to “ensuring all young people are given opportunities, levelling up where they are under-served, socially excluded and economically disadvantaged” DCMS (2022) HM Government, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052708/Levelling_up_the_UK_white_paper.pdf

→ Protocol 4

Investing in time: The need for ‘temporally-appreciative’ detached youth work

We have sufficient commentary from participants to believe that a protocol related to **time** is needed. Certainly, the above approaches and related protocols – **trust-based relationships, practices that respect and enhance autonomy, and reconnaissance** – take time.

Detached youth workers’ experience of working to support young people during the COVID-19-related ‘lockdowns’ demonstrated the value of existing long-term relationships. It was much easier to maintain contact with young people and to provide support and assistance to them having had existing relationships. Furthermore, these relationships gave confidence to young people and wider communities at a time of great anxiety and disruption. Young people described how they “kept odd hours”, “had altered body clocks” and how ‘lockdown’ had negatively affected their lifestyles, mental health and ability to engage with schooling (especially remote learning).

Many detached youth workers experienced changed working patterns, including periods of working from home. Some said that this had given them more time for reflection, led them to critique their prior experiences of ‘busyness’ and think more about how ‘time works’ in detached youth work.

It becomes clear that trust-based relationships are born of long-term presence in communities, including a substantial period of time invested in **reconnaissance** (that period of time where detached youth workers can learn about the community and the young people within it). This process establishes the foundations for good and effective practice. And yet, very many workers have significant experience of working on short-term projects, and often refer to “not having enough time” to work in ways that have long-term benefits for young people. Time is considered an essential **resource**.

it becomes clear that trust-based relationships are born of long-term presence in communities

Many workers commented on the efficiencies of long-term work; of how becoming a ‘fixture’ in the community supports contact-making: a culture develops where ‘the word gets around’ that detached youth workers exist and can be trusted. Young people then seek the workers out. In contrast, workers working for short periods of time (on short-term contracts) speak of having to invest considerable time in contact-making and relationship-building, over and over again.

Detached youth workers repeatedly question why so much funding is short-term and lacking in sustainability. In extremis, we heard of detached youth work where there was “only funding for one night a week” and needing to “make choices about what’s most useful that night.” Even ‘sessions’ are spoken about in terms of the strict allotment of time and how this might not fit with the need to stay out on the street for longer (or start earlier) in response to what is happening in the lives of young people. This included “providing ‘face-to-face’ support to young people who need additional bespoke help outside of regular detached youth work sessions.” We might say that the flexibility called for has a temporal dimension; that good and effective detached youth work responds to the rhythm and pace of young people’s lives.

Time is also needed for the essential work of networking, recording, monitoring and evaluation. So too for reflection and other activities that support the development and improvement of practice.

Equally, for young people to have opportunities to be involved in these processes, as the principle of participation demands, the need for investment in ‘temporally-appreciative’, long-term, detached youth work is clear.

→ Protocol 5

Reconnaissance: Preparing and learning

We chose the term ‘reconnaissance’ in preference to other terms, like ‘community profiling’, because, in its literal sense, reconnaissance means ‘recognising’ or ‘coming to know’, and in an appreciative manner; which seems to fit well with the values described earlier.

Reconnaissance is essential; first and foremost, it helps to establish the needs of young people and inform judgements as to whether detached youth work is a reasonable, appropriate, and likely effective response to those needs. Sometime, reconnaissance informs the conclusion that detached work is not what’s needed, in which case, other forms of intervention should be considered. This is particularly important where wider stakeholders have in mind detached youth work as a solution to the issues they have identified (see earlier discussion). Above all, the findings of the reconnaissance period must be considered authoritative and ascribed high status in decision-making; they should inform the dialogue elements identified in the **language** protocol.

**reconnaissance is essential -
it helps establish the needs
of young people**

It is implicit that **resources** be made available to undertake **reconnaissance**, and that this includes sufficient time for workers to come to know an area well enough to determine, with confidence, the needs of young people. This will often involve discussions with a wide range of actors, including those (as the case may be) who seek to commission detached youth work as a response to particular issues.

It is important to note that reconnaissance, in furnishing workers with community knowledge, also acts as a protective factor and, as such, it is linked to **safe-working**.

Reconnaissance needs to be on-going; things change in the lives of young people and wider communities and workers need time to research and understand these changes in order to be able to respond to them as the work develops.

“We meet young people in the places they choose to (or can only!) hangout in, with the people they choose to hangout with. We get to know them and see what happens in those places with them.”

→ Protocol 6

Detached youth work and community development

The findings of this project make it clear that detached youth workers view wider communities as an important resource that they can learn from, draw upon and work with.

This protocol calls for investment in community development models of practice that encourage members of those communities to learn about detached youth work and act in ways supportive of detached youth work and young people more generally. That includes contributing to the ‘generalised social responsibility to safeguard young people’ invoked in contextual safeguarding (see **safe-working**).

Community development-oriented practices display extraordinary efficiencies; local people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that actively support young people on a daily basis, regardless of whether the detached youth workers are present or not. The relationships that workers form with local people often lead to those people themselves volunteering.

wider communities are an important resource that workers can learn from, draw upon and work with

Conversely, many detached workers express frustration that the pressure to adopt more targeted practices makes it more difficult for them to engage wider communities. Put simply, individuated / case load-oriented ways of working rarely have the visibility that community development models benefit from.

Community development approaches work in tandem with community education. They support the advancement of the widest possible understanding of what detached youth work is, and equally what it is not (see earlier). The mutual learning already alluded to ensures that communities become informed about the work of detached youth workers, and vice versa: workers develop a better understanding of local issues and problems, but also assets and resources¹¹.

Community development approaches help to dispel moral panics and challenge negative perceptions of young people. They are essential to advocacy work which contests these negative perceptions and advances more positive attitudes toward young people.

“Why aren’t young people’s needs and voices at the centre of the planning, strategy and delivery of detached youth work?”

¹¹ Goetchius, G. and Tash M.J. (1967) Working with Unattached Youth: Problem, approach, method, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

→ Protocol 7

Safeguarding and safe-working

Safe-working is used here as an over-arching term that encompasses keeping both young people and youth workers safe in the context of detached work. As such, it includes risk-assessment and safeguarding.

Given that the practice aims to contact and engage young people with whom other agencies often struggle to connect with, detached youth workers are likely to come into contact with young people experiencing disadvantage, who may have particular vulnerabilities. While this makes safeguarding particularly pertinent to detached youth work, it gives rise to some inevitable tensions and dilemmas. Typically, the commitment to respect a young person's right to determine the terms of their engagement with detached workers (which, we have noted, is both an ethical and pragmatic position) can be in tension with protecting them from harm, where the decisions workers may need to make can be viewed by young people as in conflict with their own agency and autonomy. A full appreciation of the concept of confidentiality (from 'confid': with faith) derived from good training is particularly important.

external pressures to target particular young people may push workers to attempt forms of engagement that young people interpret as intrusive

A further historical tension arises when there are external pressures (typically from partner agencies) to target particular young people. Subject to this pressure, workers may attempt forms of engagement that young people

interpret as intrusive. This can be counter-productive, as young people may actively reject workers' approaches (see also protocol relating to **autonomy-respecting and autonomy-enhancing practices**).

'Safeguarding' has become a widely used and often 'catch-all' term, and it is reasonable to affirm a primary concern for young people. However, this protocol seeks to extend this concern to the welfare of workers, as well as to the wider community of practice of detached youth work and the communities worked with; the safety and security of multiple stakeholders should always be considered.

Contextual safeguarding (CS)¹² approaches are particularly appropriate to detached youth work and in tune with the 'context-appreciative' orientation of good and effective practice. CS identifies context, situation, and language as critical lenses through which to view and make sense of what's happening, and what needs to be done to keep young people safe.

Working in public space settings demands high levels of professional judgement and the ability to think critically about risk and safety, particularly in relation to young people's risk-taking behaviours. Workers must be careful to avoid a prescriptive stance (such as explicitly arguing against risk-taking behaviours) as this can be counter-productive and create barriers to engagement. Rather, workers have to work with young people's own perceptions of the value of those behaviours. This protocol therefore asserts the importance of a nuanced, context-appreciative approach, in tune with the specific situations that workers come across. They need scope to engage with young people's understanding of the world if they are to maintain relationships with young people.

In an attempt to escape from the linear thinking that narrowly equates risk-taking with negative outcomes, some workers draw upon theories of 'triangulation', whereby they consider both positive and negative possibilities.

What emerges here is the need for a culture of support for professional judgement; this is what this protocol aims to secure.

¹² Firmin, C. (2017) Contextual Safeguarding: An overview of the operational, strategic and conceptual framework, University of Bedfordshire, <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>

→ Protocol 8

Anti-oppressive practice

There are numerous references in these protocols to deliberative processes, primarily aimed at bringing a range of stakeholders together to make decisions about the commissioning of detached youth work.

This protocol stresses the importance of subjecting these decisions to an equalities impact assessment as part of a wider commitment to anti-oppressive practice.

Manchester is very diverse and care must be taken to ensure that the youth workforce is representative of the communities worked with, and that the practice of detached youth work is demonstrably anti-oppressive and free from discrimination. Our consultation identified a specific concern about systemic racism and the need to be alert to demands that – by accident or design – target particular groups of young people in unreasonable and prejudicial ways.

care must be taken to ensure the youth workforce is representative of the communities worked with and that work is demonstrably anti-oppressive

What's imagined is an arena where a range of actors can come together to consider issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion and where this becomes part and parcel of commissioning arrangements.

→ Protocol 9

Workforce development

Training, education and professional development

This protocol asserts the value of a culture of learning in relation to detached youth work that is as inclusive as possible. Given the conceptual problems that we have identified, the broadest range of stakeholders need to have the opportunity to explore the meaning and value of detached youth work. This will help to achieve a consistent and shared understanding of the principles and practices that define it. Appreciating what can be expected of workers (and what it is unreasonable to expect) flows from this understanding. We have in mind detached youth workers, their managers, funders, commissioners, and those representing partner agencies – indeed anyone involved in decision-making in relation to detached youth work. This might also include board members, trustees and local authority councillors.

Consolidation of this protocol demands that all involved commit to 'topping-up' their learning as the work evolves and (as is likely) as new contexts emerge. Again, the dialogue inferred in the **language** protocol will inform dynamic decision-making in relation to these new contexts.

We go further in suggesting a programme of public education be put in place and resources made available for this within detached youth work budgets. For example, tenants of a Housing Association that employs detached youth workers would be encouraged to learn about detached youth work as part of a wider commitment to **community development** – a process seen as essential to good and effective practice. The culture of learning we refer to emphasises mutual learning.

Training detached youth workers

Workers are central to this inclusive approach to learning about detached youth work, but they clearly have particular training needs. In recent years, however, scant attention has been paid to the training of youth workers, regardless of the settings they work in. It is unsurprising then that there have been few opportunities for workers to undertake specialist training in detached work. Indeed, this project has revealed that, all too often, workers are directed to work on the street having received very little training. This protocol seeks to address and prioritise this issue.

One of the greatest ironies is that many highly trained professionals from a range of services working with young people, in effect, pass on responsibility for working with young people to a youth service that has relatively modest levels of training. This happens in spite of the fact that it is obvious that those working with young people who may have complex lives should be highly trained and given opportunities for continuous professional development.

it is obvious that those working with young people who may have complex lives should be highly trained

The quality of young people's experience is highly dependent on having contact with well-trained staff. Poorly trained workers benefit neither young people, nor the workers themselves, as they can become disillusioned when struggling with their work.

Opportunities for training and professional development should be made available to all detached workers throughout their careers. This should be of the highest quality and informed / evaluated in-line with the protocol on **quality assurance**.

Much has been done, albeit on an ad hoc basis, both locally and nationally to establish a relevant curriculum for the training of detached youth workers. It would be appropriate to commission a working group to agree and create a training programme that delivers this. This group should also be tasked with advocating for the inclusion of a specific module on detached youth work in professional (JNC-validated) training courses. This would increase the likelihood that those coming to work in Manchester as detached youth workers are well-prepared for the challenges they will face.

“How can detached youth work break structural and systemic inequalities?”

Training for young people

This protocol also calls for specific investment in the training of young people, both in terms of (what might have been historically called) 'Senior Member training' (wherein some young people have opportunities to learn how to support other younger people), and specific training in youth work. This would affirm the findings of the participatory workshops, which demonstrated a strong interest in 'growing our own'.

→ Protocol 10

Support systems

Support systems go hand-in-hand with training and professional development. This protocol asserts the need for these support functions and making them available to all detached youth workers. The bedrock of these support systems is the community of detached youth work practice, which should be convened regularly to provide a space for reflection.

the community of detached youth work practice should be convened regularly to provide a space for reflection

Training and professional development require **resources**, of which **time** is often the most valuable; many workers report the intensification of their work such that there is little time to reflect on it, and even less time explicitly dedicated to this purpose. This protocol asserts the need for a range of support mechanisms to address these issues.

Networking

Networking is an important professional activity. As well as making possible **partnership-working**, networking has a supportive function, particularly in identifying other actors with whom detached workers might collaborate, including as part of local peer-learning groups or on a one-to-one 'buddying' basis.

Beyond the locality, there are city-wide, regional, national, pan-european, and even international networks. All constitute places of learning and mutual support, wherein participation can have multiple benefits. Some facilitate exchanges. Many of these networks have an on-line presence and organise webinars, which can make them more accessible. A commitment to this protocol demands that workers should have opportunities to engage with at least some of these mechanisms.

Supervision

Supervision is central to the on-going **support systems** that all detached workers need. It complements training and professional development and is especially important for detached workers, given that their work can often be socially isolated.

There are various forms of supervision, all of which are valuable. Ideally, workers will have access to both personal managerial supervision and non-managerial supervision (sometimes called 'clinical' supervision). This protocol asserts this is essential to the development of professional practice.

This protocol also advocates for sufficient **resources** to provide these opportunities; this includes identifying those who can act as supervisors. When asked to make recommendations for the improvement of detached youth work, many workshop participants (conscious no doubt of resource constraints) proposed training in supervision in order that they could supervise one another. Likewise, self-facilitated group supervision, peer-to-peer supervision, 'buddying' are also resource efficient; they are, though, complementary activities and should not replace professional supervision, in which an individual's learning is the focus of attention.

Intervention and tacit knowledge workshops

Intervention and tacit knowledge workshops are among other support mechanisms, although these require skilled facilitation, which may demand (and indeed benefit from) investment in external experts.

supervision is central to the on-going support systems all detached workers need

→ Protocol 11

Resources

Detached youth work self-evidently requires resources in order to be effective. Quantifying this is not a matter for protocols, but the outcomes of the participatory workshops are unequivocal in stating that funding should be long-term, flexible, and locally-determined i.e. subject to the dialogue-based decision-making process identified in the **language** protocol (see also protocols on **governance** and **management**).

There were particular concerns and frustrations about time-limited contracts. Many detached youth workers stated they had been asked to work in areas for short periods of time (c. 6 months). They identify significant risks and inefficiencies associated with this culture of 'short-termism'. This, they say, makes it impossible to undertake any meaningful, in-depth, **reconnaissance** and very difficult to adopt the '**temporally-appreciative**' approach to their work called for earlier: working slowly if necessary, and in tune with the rhythm and pace of young people's lives. In so many respects, we can say that **time** is an essential resource in detached youth work.

time is an essential resource in detached youth work

Managers, too, spoke often of the pressure to undertake work over short periods of time. Some described their attempts to resist this, in arguing for long-term resources. In some cases, this resistance led them to reject these requests. Others stated that it would be virtually impossible to reject, given the resource-poor contexts they were working in and the constant demand to generate resources to keep their organisations going. This protocol seeks to protect workers and managers from these dilemmas.

This project has also identified a range of problems associated with fragmented funding. In response to this, what's called for is 'wrap-around support funding'. This funding should be made available to organisations delivering detached youth work and used to 'plug gaps', help them respond quickly to unforeseen situations and ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of their work.

"Why is youth work funding so short-term?"

→ Protocol 12

Reporting, monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance

Reporting and monitoring

Concerns about the demands of reporting and monitoring regimes are among the most common frustrations expressed by detached youth workers (see also the introductory statements). The testimony gathered particularly mentioned the expectation to record interactions with young people in numerical terms, based on 'reach' and 'participation' i.e. the numbers of young people contacted and the number engaged with more regularly. Often, this included the number of hours, or 'sessions', worked.

This emphasis on 'counting' is seen to inhibit the communication of a more nuanced, value-based, picture of detached youth work. In this, more intensive work done with individuals and small groups would be recognised and (implicitly then) valued.

Often this expectation extends to recording young people's names, ages, postcodes and, in some cases, even more personal information. Young people may be expected to share this with partner agencies, occasionally funders and sometimes council representatives and statutory agencies.

Workers also state there is often a great deal of pressure to share this data. They are particularly concerned that, sometimes, these demands are made in the name of 'safeguarding', often without qualification as to the why this should be the case, or what the data will be used for.

Sometimes these requests come from criminal justice agencies, such as the police. This invokes a further concern that the information might be used as intelligence to inform the work of those agencies and may potentially criminalise young people.

There is considerable unease among detached youth workers about this. Asking these questions is seen to hamper efforts to engage young people and, at times, is seen to constitute a very real barrier to engagement. Young people become suspicious of workers and wonder why they are prying into their lives, subjecting them to surveillance. This undermines a commitment to the 'low threshold' practices designed to ensure services are as accessible as possible. Ultimately, it means that **trust-based relationships** are more difficult to secure and maintain.

This protocol calls for a coming-together of all stakeholders to agree on what data should be collected, and what it will be used for.

“If detached youth work is done to benefit young people and meet their needs, then why aren't we measuring the things young people say are impactful for them? Where is the young person's voice in this?”

Evaluation

The most common concern expressed about evaluation relates to the perceived lack of it. Many workers judge monitoring to have become a proxy for evaluation; they feel the drive has been toward quantitative assessment, rather than qualitative.

This protocol calls for clarification of what evaluation is and why it is important, and for investment in both internal and external evaluations.

Feuerstein (1986) states “Evaluation is ‘assessing the value of something.’” It could be suggested there is a clue in the word in writing: ‘E - value - ation’, which is to assert evaluation is fundamentally related to values.

It might help also to clarify that **monitoring** is the process of collecting information about the work done; and, as has been noted, it is typically more quantitative than qualitative. Such data becomes valuable when it provides evidence of what workers do, particularly in relation to whether aims and objectives have been achieved. It also aids planning.

Evaluation, in contrast, implies much more than collection, it is an interpretative process that supports the analysis of the information gathered. It provides much of the material that stimulates reflective practice which, in turn, gets to the heart of the matter: the primary aim of evaluation is to improve services.

We find then that the best of questions are relatively simple and straightforward: what was good about what went on; what was not; and – importantly – what needs to change?

This also confirms the value of story-telling, case studies, young people’s personal testimony, and documentary processes, as forms of evaluation.

what’s needed is a system of quality assurance that values the entire life span of the work and the learning and experience that young people gain throughout

‘Something different’ was called for: the adoption of a system of **quality assurance** that employs the best of both quantitative and qualitative assessment and applies this to the entirety of the detached youth work process. The aim here is to address concerns that ‘outcomes’-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems miss the whole picture. These fail to capture, appreciate and value everything that goes on in detached youth work, from assessing needs on the basis of **reconnaissance**, to contact-making and developing relationships, to myriad – often subtle – interventions; all, that is, that happens in the process of detached youth work.

This is to resist and escape from an instrumentalised, reductive, ends-focussed culture. What’s needed is something that values the entire life span of the work and the learning and experience that young people gain throughout.

What’s proposed is an all-encompassing culture of **quality assurance** that tracks the process of detached youth work, from the earliest discussions about its applicability to its implementation, and development, and all else associated with it.

Quality assurance

In practice, delivery agencies will be expected to subscribe to:

- the provision of staff trained inline with the training protocols;
- expanding and applying the notion of ‘due diligence’ beyond financial accountability and the maintenance of systems and procedures such as **safeguarding**, to encompass the practice itself – throughout its lifespan.

Both formal and informal mechanisms are needed to achieve this. Formal mechanisms should be criteria-based; informal mechanisms should include the use of critical friends, drawn from the community of detached youth work practice.

→ Protocol 13

Management

The research activities that inform these protocols included a specific piece of work with managers of detached youth work, convened to discuss the challenges they face and to explore the kind of protocols that would assist them in their work. This work identified both internal and external functions associated with the management of detached youth work. The principal internal function, or task, spoken about was workforce development, which the protocol on training seeks to address. Workers' levels of knowledge, skills and experience matter greatly, as this influences how they engage with the expectations managers have of them. Again, training gives them the confidence to participate fully in these conversations, particularly in relation to their learning and professional development.

Management duties include **supervising** staff (with a focus on supporting their enquiry into practical responses to what happens in practice, especially those situations that workers find challenging and difficult). The aim is to help staff develop a clear understanding of what detached youth work is, the rationale behind it (why it is done), and what the role and responsibilities of the detached youth worker entail.

Of the **external** functions, working with partner agencies (including funders and commissioners) was considered the most important. Particularly, this implied work aimed at managing expectations.

Some managers spoke of working to ensure their staff did not internalise a deficit-oriented view of young people, which often lies behind the 'problem-fixing' notions of detached work held by some external agencies and some members of the community. In this sense, this protocol constitutes a means to protect detached youth workers from undue pressure to behave in a manner that might undermine a broader commitment to ethical practices.

That said, these expectations sometimes come from managers, who are often acutely aware they can 'get lost in the process' given the often intense financial pressure they face. All agree that the demand to generate income (often perceived as necessary to keep services going) creates ethical dilemmas and the danger of co-option into problematic policy agendas¹³. It is clear that the challenge of securing **resources** for detached youth work can become all-consuming; indeed, many managers invest considerable time in this. Making these resources available, through adequate commissioning arrangements, is essential if managers are to be protected from these ethical dilemmas.

There are many other issues. We find detached youth workers have diverse experiences of management, influenced by a range of contexts, particularly the settings in which they work. What's called for (as in many of the protocols) is a context-appreciative approach, which implies support for a mode of management that is fluid, dynamic and participative¹⁴. Authoritarian positions are clearly in opposition to this and tend to influence a culture of practice that is inconsistent with the values of detached youth work. Top-down models of management are ill-suited to detached youth work.

We find effective management styles mirror the context-appreciative and uncertainty-appreciative practices associated with good and effective detached youth work. This means that managers must respect and employ the findings of the **reconnaissance** process and advocate for these findings in negotiations with partner agencies. Ultimately, every project will have a particular orientation influenced by these reconnaissance processes.

We observe that effective detached youth work projects demonstrate high levels of autonomy at all levels. Managers act autonomously and facilitate the autonomy of the detached youth workers they work with, who, in turn, encourage and support the autonomy of young people. In sum, all staff need to work in ways that **enhance their own autonomy and that of others**.

¹³ This can be described as 'ethics work'.

¹⁴ See also footnote 6.

This appears easier to do in some settings, and in some organisations, than others; we find local authority projects are subject to many more expectations than those in the voluntary sector. Typically, they experience a greater demand to meet prescribed outcomes and to act in a targeted way. This pressure often comes from higher levels of management within the authority. Voluntary organisations, in contrast, experience much less compulsion; they appear to have a greater degree of freedom to ‘say no’ when and where they believe these pressures act counter to the needs of the young people. They are more likely to contest demands to work with individual young people specified by other agencies; they reject the ‘case-load’ orientation associated with social work and the idea this is applicable to detached youth work.

We also find that the hosting of detached youth work affects levels of autonomy. Housing associations, for example, tend to have a specific focus (understandably, on housing-related issues). This can, however, constrain the autonomy of workers, and their ability to respond to young people seeking support for other, non-housing, related issues. Clearly some flexibility is needed, in tandem with the managerial philosophy that these protocols advocate for.

There is nuance in this, which informs further protocols related to partnership-working. By and large, voluntary sector organisations tend to see partnership-working as a choice, or at least based on informal agreements. In this sense, they are trying to mirror the voluntary association implicit in the street-based relationships detached workers have with young people.

effective management styles mirror the context-appreciative and uncertainty-appreciative practices associated with good and effective detached youth work

This protocol asserts that partnership work with other agencies is therefore best left to informal agreement rather than be formally mandated. There should be considerable freedom to decide who to work with, including, in extremis, being able to ‘say no’ to partnership requests. This is perhaps better put in these terms: organisations should be trusted to work with one another on the basis of ‘informal’ rather than ‘formal’ partnerships; their autonomy in deciding who to work with (and who not to work with) should be respected and understood to be in the best interests of young people.

It is important this logic extends to the previously addressed issue of funding and related tensions: managers should be able to make judgements as to the funding sources they apply for. This also implies respect for the decisions managers might make to reject some funding opportunities, where the aims, objectives and ethics are regarded as in tension with those of detached youth work. We find this is less of a challenge for experienced managers, regardless of the organisations they work for, as they appear to have a greater confidence to assert the primacy of youth-centred practices. This is far less common in organisations experiencing precarious financial circumstances where, in effect, snubbing potential funding might be seen as putting the sustainability of that organisation at risk. To reiterate, a key aim of the protocols is to protect detached youth work from these ethical dilemmas. The relationship between this management protocol and the **resources** protocol, which aims to create financial security in the youth sector and protect detached youth work from unreasonable expectations and misuse. It is accepted that these matters are far from clear cut, and that there are inevitable tensions and dilemmas. However, many of the protocols emphasise the need for multi-stakeholder dialogue, especially between projects and funders in order that these dilemmas can be voiced and shared.

→ Protocol 14

Governance and the need for a strategic body

This project has generated some radical ideas about **governance**. We propose a **strategic body** that takes responsibility for determining and framing commissioning arrangements in relation to detached youth work. This body would comprise commissioners, funders, senior detached youth workers and managers of organisations who deliver detached youth work.

The aim of this group would be to facilitate a dialogue, and decision-making, about the funding of detached work in a manner that takes account of these protocols. It would consider the evidence gathered from **reconnaissance** and research activities; ‘the question of needs’; the reasonableness of detached youth work as an appropriate intervention in relation to these needs and the **resources** required to meet these needs. It would identify and distribute these resources. It would also take responsibility for addressing questions of accountability, particularly through the facilitation of local inspections. These would be undertaken by members of this body in a manner that internalises this process in order to minimise the external pressures earlier identified as contributing to feelings of frustration, and to advance a culture of critical friendship.

we propose a strategic body that takes responsibility for determining and framing commissioning arrangements for detached youth work

| Where next?



What of the future; what's next in this process?

We fervently hope this report provokes further conversations in which the protocols are valued as a stimulus for continued dialogue among the many detached youth workers, managers and funders who contributed to their creation and those who were unable to take part. We are committed to young people's participation in this process; we are keen to listen to what they think.

We also want to review and value the 'outlier' comments mentioned above as potential further stimuli for thinking critically and in innovative ways about detached youth work. Then we want to 'test' the protocols 'in practice' and reflect on their use, again in participatory ways. These are all essential elements of a process, a process we embarked on some time ago, and a process we hope will continue to evolve.

| About the author



Graeme Tiffany was a detached youth worker and detached youth work manager for many years. He now works on an independent basis, as a trainer, lecturer, researcher, and education consultant, with a particular focus on street-based work, democratic education and the use of philosophical tools to support learning.

Graeme is the author of 'Reconnecting Detached Youth Work' (2007) and numerous book chapters and articles about detached youth work. He is an advisor to the Federation for Detached Youth Work and has worked often with Dynamo International, the world-wide network of social street workers.

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Appendix

DSLSSG Short Description of Detached Youth Work and its Processes¹⁵

Detached youth work is a long-term, purposeful, sustained, flexible and responsive, place-based practice, which draws on the principles and practices of informal education. Through constructive dialogue, workers aim to equip young people to 'live wisely' – to make informed positive life-choices that make for their own and others' well-being.

First and foremost, detached youth work is 'person-centred': it starts where young people are, both physically and with what's important to and for young people. Any 'tasks', 'agendas' or 'outcomes' are developed out of the lived experience of young people and negotiated through the conversations young people and workers have together, 'in situ'. The work is flexible in relation to timings and the settings (spaces and places) in which the work takes place.

What do detached youth workers do? The process of detached youth work

Detached youth work requires skilled and reflective youth work practitioners. Workers begin by learning about the environment (the 'patch') where the detached youth work will take place, usually in a neighbourhood. This learning process is known as 'reconnaissance' and includes:

- getting to know the area and environment, who owns it, who 'inhabits' it, the culture and norms of behaviour, where young people spend their time (and why), what happens where and when, and working out what's already available;
- learning about the demographics, 'territories', cultures and life opportunities for residents and particularly young people;
- making contact with those people and agencies based and already working in the area, for example, community members and groups, other youth workers, and those associated with housing associations, shops and cafés, faith-based groups, leisure facilities, libraries, the police, schools, etc.;

Workers use a strengths-based approach to develop a strategy for engaging young people.

Workers go to the settings where young people choose to be, in public space, on the streets, in parks, libraries, cafés, playgrounds, shops etc., and at the times young people choose. They often join in with what young people are already doing (assuming it's legal).

Workers use themselves and conversation as the primary 'tool' for engaging young people and work at the young people's pace in order to establish genuine trust.

Workers encourage fun, thoughtful and engaging conversations and dialogue with and between young people in order to:

- develop relationships of trust and mutual respect;
- learn about young people's lives, communities, talents, experiences, interests and concerns;
- work with young people and their interests and concerns at their pace, rather than trying to control them or manage their behaviour;
- collaborate with young people to plan and develop activities, projects, campaigns and actions relevant to young people, in ways that foster fun, learning about life, action, change and young people's choice and agency. These activities typically move the work and relationships into different settings, whilst maintaining engagement on the street;
- encourage critical thinking, reflection and evaluation, leading to further action and change.

Workers offer individual and group support and advocacy where needed, often beyond the initial setting, in local networks, meetings and arenas.

¹⁵ The DSLSSG wrote this in 2019 to meet the need for a short description of the process of detached youth work as a starting point for conversations between workers, managers, partners, funders and commissioners. We offer it here, alongside the Protocols as a stimulus for conversation.

The crux of the matter appears to lie in how detached youth work is conceptualised; in recent years it has come to epitomise a 'floating concept' - often understood very differently by different stakeholders. Each seems to view the practice in ways that suit their particular interests and the particular outcomes they wish to see detached youth workers 'deliver'. Fundamentally, defining 'detached youth work' (just as with 'youth in society') has become a site of contested values.

These protocols identify this as a real problem, and assert the need for a process where all involved in detached youth work (whether practitioners, managers, representatives of partner agencies, commissioners or funders) participate in a regular dialogue about the meaning and value of detached youth work aimed at securing shared understandings. Such a consensus is seen as foundational to effective decision-making, which is crucial to good practice.

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