

# Knowsley Youth Service Report

Knowsley Children's Services Authority Area

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**Age group:** All

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## Introduction

1. Knowsley Youth Service is part of the Youth and Play Service now located within the Directorate of Children's Services having transferred from Leisure, Community and Culture in April 2006. Delivery is through centre-based and detached youth work, specialist projects, and schools. Three Area Managers and two borough wide managers support the head of service. Provision is delivered by 14 full time equivalent (FTE) neighbourhood youth workers and 56 sessional workers, 28 of which are 18hr posts. The teenage population is 15,709. The budget provided by the local authority for 2007-08 is £1.4 million. External funding totals £1.3 million, which includes £318, 000, allocated to the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF). In 2006-07 the service reached 29% of young people aged 13-19.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the service's self-assessment and met with officers, partners and a cross section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out a number of direct observations of youth work sessions.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. The youth service provides an adequate service for its users and offers satisfactory value for money. Most young people achieve good personal gains. There is good accredited learning in a variety of settings, particularly in targeted work. Effective partnerships enhance the overall range of provision. However progress in developing the service since the previous inspection in 2002 has been slow; strategic direction has been lacking and quality assurance and performance management has been inadequate. Relocation of the service into the Directorate of Children's Services is now providing the necessary strategic direction and support and satisfactory progress is being made to improve service delivery and develop an integrated youth support service by 2008. However, there is insufficient commitment to equality and diversity. There are inconsistencies in the standards of provision. Alternative curriculum work is providing a range of accredited learning opportunities in schools and leading to improvements in attendance, behaviour and attainment. Too often though, young people are insufficiently motivated by the youth work programmes offered and display limited aspirations. The core budget is low in comparison with statistical neighbours. Youth work is supported by considerable external funds to good effect but there is an over reliance on this form of income.

#### Strengths

- Some good accredited learning takes place in a variety of settings.

- Young people are making good personal gains through engaging with the youth service.
- Effective partnerships enhance the range of provision
- A good training and staff development programme, linked well to service priorities is contributing to improvements in quality
- Youth work staff display strong commitment to young people and know them well.

### Areas for development

- The recording of young people's learning is underdeveloped
- Overall there is insufficient challenge and low expectations of what young people can achieve.
- There is insufficient strategic direction and commitment to equality and diversity.
- Young people are not always involved effectively in needs analysis, planning and evaluation.
- Too many staff are insufficiently qualified
- The relationship with the voluntary and community youth sector is underdeveloped.

### Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	2
	Quality of youth work practice	2
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	2
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	2

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

**Grade 4:** Excellent/outstanding: a service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 3:** Good: a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 2:** Adequate: a service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 1:** Inadequate: a service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

## **Part B: The youth service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes**

4. The service is making a good contribution to ECM outcomes. Very good Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) programmes, delivered in partnership with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) have led to reductions in unwanted or unplanned teenage pregnancies. The THINK Clinics and 'Clinic in a box' are examples of good practice. Effective safeguarding procedures are in place. Off-site procedures are good, Health and safety checks and risk assessments are thorough. Gay Youth Knowsley is a good initiative providing a safe environment for vulnerable young people. Positive Activities for Young People contribute well to the provision of diversionary activities for young people at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity. Targeted work with disabled young people is good, but there is insufficient provision for young people of black and minority ethnic (BME) heritage. Support to some schools, through effective alternative curriculum programmes leads to young people gaining accredited awards that support their attainment at Key Stage 4. The YOF/BIG DEAL is a good initiative through which some young people are engaged effectively in decision-making at borough level; they also participate through the activities of the local Youth Fora.

## **Part C: Commentary on the key aspects**

### **Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice**

5. Most young people are achieving good personal gains through engaging with the service. Information to help them make informed choices, in particular through the SRE programmes is leading to reductions in unwanted or unplanned teenage pregnancies, increased use of contraceptive services, improved levels of Chlamydia awareness and greater understanding of the need to adopt healthier lifestyles. Work with disabled young people at the Copthorne additional needs group was developing individual confidence levels and providing good information on environmental themes. At the North Huyton Youth Forum young people were leading the session thereby developing good negotiation and decision-making skills. In some sessions however, insufficient challenge and low expectations weakened the potential achievements of young people. The service is making good progress in meeting its targets relating to recorded and accredited learning, but this is inconsistent across the service. In too many sessions, the recording of young people's learning was underdeveloped, particularly so in centre based and open access work.

6. Young people achieve well through a range of accredited Opportunities. These include the successful Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme, which has developed a range of award units in schools, the Youth Achievement Awards (YAA) and the local 'Mayor's Award'. Some young people are developing good

musical and performance skills, through the 'Band nights', which lead to bi-monthly showcase events. Young people gain a great deal from the four area youth forums that provide representatives to the Youth Parliament. Through these forums young people have been involved in developing the Participation Standards, which have been newly adopted and launched by the Children and Young People's partnership. Young people's involvement at unit level in needs analysis, planning and evaluation is less well developed however. At a strategic and operational level however, more could be done to provide a coherent response to the high proportion of young people who are NEET.

7. Youth work practice is adequate overall although there are wide variations in standards across the service. The best work included some exemplary practice. Youth workers had planned well, were confident in their delivery and could clearly provide evidence of young people's learning. These programmes were imaginative and engaged young people well. The most effective work was seen in targeted and project work. Overall youth workers display strong commitment to young people, know their circumstances and communities well and morale is generally high. In the few examples of poor practice, standards of achievement were constrained by workers' failure to identify and evaluate intended outcomes. In some sessions, planning, monitoring and evaluation lacked rigour and were not effective in raising standards. There were too many examples where young people were insufficiently motivated by programmes of predominantly recreational activity.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

8. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate overall. Youth work takes place in a variety of centre-based venues, often these are purpose built community centres shared with other users, in schools and in other locations used for detached youth work and specialist projects. There is however, an over reliance on 'traditional delivery' sites. Most buildings, particularly those that are shared, are in the main not conducive to delivering high quality youth work and young people's activities are severely restricted. Developing more appropriate sites is proving difficult due to budget restrictions. Targeted street work is of good quality and responsive to incidences of anti social behaviour in most areas of the borough. Multi-disciplinary 'Hustle' initiatives, involving youth workers are providing effective diversionary activity for large groups of young people at weekends.

9. The service's curriculum framework, developed in collaboration by local authorities in the area, links the five outcomes to youth work programmes, to corporate objectives and targets and is responsive to young people's needs. The management of the curriculum priorities however is not sufficiently robust and not adequately reflected in unit programmes. For example equality and diversity are identified as a priority, and whilst there are examples of appropriate provision, overall they are insufficiently reflected in service, area and unit planning.

10. Gay Youth Knowsley, run in partnership with the PCT and the Armistead project in Liverpool is providing an effective response for vulnerable young people enabling them to make new friends and discuss sensitive issues in a safe environment. Good work is being done with specific groups of young people with disabilities and those with learning difficulties. The recent appointment of an Inclusion Officer to support young disabled people is proving beneficial in helping them integrate into mainstream provision, where they have achieved a number of accredited awards. Work with looked after young people, particularly in relation to sex and relationship education (SRE) projects is leading to good outcomes. Work with some groups, for example young people from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities, is less well developed.

11. Progress has been slow in developing the workforce, due in part to delays in implementing a reorganisation. As a consequence too many full time staff are unqualified, despite a planned programme for them to achieve professional qualifications. Expected improvements in standards of practice have not been achieved. Staff supervision and appraisal are undertaken regularly and are valued. There is a good training and staff development programme, linked well to service targets, part of a new Employee Development Strategy.

12. Plans are in hand to include youth provision in the new Learning Centres, part of the Building Schools for the Future initiative, which is timely, given the accommodation issues identified above. The youth service has few buildings of its own and uses a variety of shared buildings, which are generally unsuitable and in which young people are not allowed to create their own spaces. Compliance with Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 legislation is good; all buildings are accessible for those with mobility difficulties. The range and use of specialist resources and equipment varies considerably; some centres have for example good information and communications technology and music equipment which enhance the provision while others have too few resources. The service benefits from free and subsidised use of sports centres and free access to the outdoor education facilities, which are well used. Four mini-buses are used well. The necessary health and safety standards and risk assessments are all thorough and of good quality.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

13. Strategic and operational leadership and management are adequate overall. Effective strategic direction is now being provided since the service's move to the Directorate of Children's Services. Recent senior management changes have strengthened support for the service and are leading to improvements. The service has been slow in progressing the key areas for development identified in the 2002 inspection by Ofsted. The core budget is low in comparison with statistical neighbours and development of the core elements of the service is consequently restricted, notwithstanding good use being made of external funding to supplement and extend the provision. Quality assurance (QA) arrangements are satisfactory; a new management information system is providing a useful range of information. A quality assurance group meets regularly to monitor the returns



from centres and assess the quality of the completed documentation. Findings from this analysis however are not yet being used effectively to improve standards, planning and evaluation. A newly established internal inspection programme has to date only been applied in four settings, but the standard of these inspections is good and a regular programme of inspection is planned.

14. The strategic direction and commitment given to equality and diversity, in particular the lack of clear and measurable targets is inadequate. Needs analysis is not sufficiently robust and there is no clear identification of priority groups. Reporting procedures for racist incidents are in place at a corporate level, but staff have not yet been trained to make effective use of this process. Safeguarding procedures are in place, including Criminal Record Bureau checks and child protection training, although not all staff have yet been trained. A good range of policies and procedures effectively underpin the work, and create a healthy and safe working environment

15. A wide range of partnerships extend the range of the provision. Although commissioning arrangements are not yet in place, partners, such as the PCT, the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT), the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and some schools are pleased with their current contracts, are satisfied with the outcomes for young people and are keen to continue the funding arrangements. The relationships with the voluntary and community youth sectors are however, underdeveloped. Joint action planning with the Connexions service, and recent joint management arrangements are leading to closer working and preparing both services well for the formation of an integrated youth support service by March 2008.