Policy Advice Brief

Draft Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers

Commonwealth Youth Programme



The Commonwealth

Draft Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers

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Printed and published by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

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Youth Division



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Introduction

The Draft Commonwealth Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers is motivated by the importance of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of young people and those that work with them. The Code seeks to draw attention to particular International Conventions and Commonwealth member Governments' legislation in regard to safe work practices with young people and to document the values and principles that underpin ethical youth work practice in the Commonwealth.

Preamble

The Commonwealth Youth Sector is currently without an endorsed Code of Ethical Practice. With the endorsement of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015 and its call for the professionalisation of the youth work sector and creation of codes of practice based in human rights, there is a Commonwealth-wide expectation to move towards an endorsed code of ethical practice for youth workers.

Make a submission on the Commonwealth's 'Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers' -Why your input is important

The development of this Draft Commonwealth's 'Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers' offers an opportunity for the youth work sector across the Commonwealth to engage in important debate around youth work and ethical practice. It also allows for the development of a tool to assist all youth work professionals to approach their work with young people within a strong ethical framework based in Human Rights in line with the Commonwealth Youth Program PAYE goals. It will assist in guiding practice and to articulate the nature and objectives of that practice to others. By engaging in this debate and contributing a response to this Draft Code, members of the youth sector are able to assist to build a Code that is relevant, useful and of value to the Commonwealth.

The consultation and drafting process to date

This draft Commonwealth Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers builds on existing codes of youth work practice and similar documents from both Australia and International sources. It has been strongly influenced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's original 2006 working draft that was developed by Tim Corney and Lauren Hoiles. As such, the Author wishes to gratefully acknowledge The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic), the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and the United Kingdom National Youth Agency (UKNYA) for their willingness to allow the use and reproduction of their respective codes of ethics/ practice within this document. The Author would also like to acknowledge the following individuals and organisations for their comments and contribution to the original YACVic project: Robyn Broadbent, Victoria University, Howard Sercombe Strathclyde University, Georgie Ferrari and Jen Rose YACVic.

Ethics

There are numerous ways to address the issue of 'ethics' in a code of practice. These may include adopting or subscribing to specific underpinning ethical theories or philosophies. However, many would argue that one of the strengths of the youth sector is the diversity of philosophical and religious traditions contained within it. As such we believe that the basis for making 'ethical' judgments about youth work practice will be assisted and informed by applying the principles, values and conventions based in Human Rights and embodied in this document. For some this may be simply summed up in the ancient dictum 'primum non nocere' - First, do no harm.

What is a Code of Ethical Practice?

A Code of Ethical Practice is a document developed by a body of practitioners to provide an agreed framework or set of values for professional practice. A Code of Ethics can also be described as 'a set of norms based on the belief systems or values of a group of people who agree to adhere to commonly held philosophical principles' (Outten 1991:8).

At the basic level a Code of Ethical Practice provides a set of statements about what is considered good practice, while at its best it provides an overarching guide for workers to apply ethical principles in a specific practice context (Youth Action and Policy Association [YAPA] 2005). A Code of Ethical Practice also provides workers with a frame of reference in which to develop ethical awareness, create discussion of ethical issues and implement good and safe practice for both clients and workers.

The code may be self-regulatory and voluntarily adhered to, or it may be imposed by government or sector-based imperatives (YAPA 2005; Child Safety Commissioner 2006; Barwick 2006). It is proposed at this stage, that this code be voluntary, and youth workers and organisations across the Commonwealth are encouraged to adopt it.

Why Does the Commonwealth Need a Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers?

Safety of Young People

First and foremost, the safety of young people is fundamental to the practice of youth work. Many countries across the Commonwealth have acknowledged this in government legislation. For example, the Australian 'Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005' Section 5 1 (c) states that 'Those who develop and provide services, as well as parents, should give the highest priority to the promotion and protection of a child's safety, health, development, education and wellbeing'. Creating a safe environment where young people are able to actively participate in their community is at the core of youth work (Youth Coalition of the ACT 2003; NYA 2004).

One of the most effective ways a profession or sector can ensure the safety of the people it works with is to implement a Code of Ethical Practice (Victorian Child Safety Commissioner 2006). A Code of Ethical Practice helps to protect young people from harm by making clear 'professional boundaries, ethical behaviour and acceptable and unacceptable relationships' (Victorian Child Safety Commissioner 2006:11). This does not mean that creative ways of working with young people will be marginalised, but rather that those creative ways can be developed under a set of principles that ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the young person is central to any decisions made (Barwick 2006).

Safety & Protection of Workers

A Code of Ethical Practice also contributes to the safety of both young people and workers by providing a clear expectation about ethical behaviour, acceptable and unacceptable relationships and professional boundaries for workers (YAPA 2005; YACWA 2003). Indeed, the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner (2006:11) suggests that when professionals '...are clear about expectations, they are much more likely to act appropriately with each other...' and with young people.

Without a Code of Ethical Practice, or a strong set of guiding principles, it can be difficult to ensure that all workers are working together to create a safe environment. If there are no standards upon which to guide good practice, it can be difficult to argue against poor practice (Barwick 2006). If a situation arises wherein poor practice is observed, a Code of Ethical Practice allows the profession, organisation, and/or worker to ask someone to explain that behaviour (Victorian Child Safety Commissioner 2006). It further provides a standard to inform and guide the pre-service and in-service training of workers and volunteers.

In their article 'Why the Youth Sector Needs a Code of Ethical Practice', Corney and Hoiles (2006) put forth the view of a Code as a combination of both a code of ethics and a code of conduct, with an aim to provide a necessary framework for the profession to be used by workers in their work practice and the sector as a whole.

In essence, a code will provide workers and agencies with a statement of both ethical principles, worker boundaries and practices giving us a guide that outlines a set of values to inform our professional practice.

Human Rights - A framework for ethical youth work practice

Under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR1948), the *International Bill of Human Rights* (IBHR1966) and as expressed in the *Conventions on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC1989), young people are considered fully human, and as such should have access to human rights both in international law and under the laws of those countries that have ratified the conventions.

Across the Commonwealth there is increasing recognition of the importance of considering human rights in the way in which we work with young people and how we establish and monitor programs, policies and procedures. The Commonwealth's PAYE goals explicitly call for a code of practice for youth workers based in human rights to be established.

Human rights outline the basic standards that are essential for people to live with dignity and respect. They are founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each person regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability. Just as we all have rights, we also have a responsibility to respect and promote the rights of others. This is why human rights should underpin the work of youth workers.

The United Nations set a common standard on human rights with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Since then the United Nations has developed a series of declarations, treaties and conventions which outline rights in specific areas (such as civil and political rights) or for particular groups of people (e.g. the rights of women). Once a country agrees to adopt these standards, the government is obliged to respect, protect and realise the rights of all people.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has particular relevance to youth work practice. The UNUNCRC is a treaty for the protection and promotion of rights of children and young people up to the age of 18 years.

The Convention sets out the basic human rights that children and young people have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil and social services.

As many of the member Commonwealth countries have ratified the UNUNCRC, they are obliged to create and amend laws and policies to implement the Convention and must consider all actions in light of the best interests of the child.

The provision of services must also be underpinned by human rights as outlined in Articles, 3.1 & 3.3 of the UNCRC which provide a direct link between human rights and ethical practice:

> **Article 3.1.** In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
>
> **Article 3.3.** States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Human Rights and the Concept of Youth Participation in the Commonwealth

Encouraging the advancement of young people's human rights and citizenship – through full and active political participation and engagement with the democratic processes and governance of their countries – has long been a core commitment of the Commonwealth. The *Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles 1971* (No. 6) states clearly that:

> We believe in the liberty of the individual, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief, and in their inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which they live. We therefore strive to promote in each of our countries those representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law that are our common heritage.

This '*right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which one lives*' was re-affirmed in 1991 in the *Harare declaration of Commonwealth principles* and, in relation to young people, has been built upon and expanded in various Commonwealth forums. For example, the recommendations of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (Commonwealth 2011:2-3) suggested, in regard to young people's participation and citizenship, that:

> Youth representatives should be supported to improve their local communities through working relationships with locally elected representatives and other local governance structures [...] All Commonwealth member Governments should establish national mechanisms, such as national youth councils, so that the views of young people can be taken into account in all possible aspects of national policy development.

Perhaps the most definitive declaration on the 'Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth' can be found in the *Commonwealth Charter* 2012. The Charter brings together the values and aspirations which unite the Commonwealth - democracy, human rights and the rule of law - in a single, accessible document.

Article XIII of the Charter says:

> We recognise the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures. The future success of the Commonwealth rests with the continued commitment and contributions of young people in promoting and sustaining the Commonwealth and its values and principles, and we commit to investing in and promoting their development, particularly through the creation of opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

The recent Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (Commonwealth 2013) has agreed to the establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Council to further the participation of young people in the political and governance processes of member nations.

Global Youth Work and the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) is delivered into the 53 member states of the Commonwealth, having been established by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1973 primarily to train and develop youth workers and promote the active participation of young people in their country's development (Commonwealth 2013a). It is funded by contributions from member governments and aims to:

> work towards a society where young men and women are empowered to develop their potential, creativity and skills as productive and dynamic members of their societies and participate fully at every level of decision-making and development, both individually and collectively, promoting Commonwealth values of international co-operation.
>
> (Commonwealth 2013a:1).

The CYP is grounded in a human rights-based approach that views young people as having an equal stake in society, and sees development as an outcome of achieving human rights. This view is also held by the young people of the Commonwealth as is confirmed by statements contained in the final communiqué from the 6th Commonwealth Youth Forum:

> Give young people half a chance and we will astound you, not only with our energy, enthusiasm and idealism, but also with our maturity and willingness to engage constructively in the process of improving our communities and our world. We are often told that as young people we are the leaders of tomorrow. Behind this seemingly simple statement lies a dangerous assumption; namely that young people have no valuable place in today's world. This should not be the case.
>
> (Commonwealth 2007:5)

The implications for Commonwealth youth workers are clear: development for young people is a human rights entitlement. As such, youth workers across the Commonwealth take on the role of advocates, facilitating access to human rights, the democratic participation of young people in all levels of decision-making, and partnering with them in the development and transformation of their societies. The Commonwealth emphasises this view by repeating the rhetorical question posed by youth work advocate Chandu Christian: *For what are youth workers if they are not facilitators of human rights and development?* (Commonwealth 2006:4).

The Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment and a Code of Practice for Youth Work

The Commonwealth is informed by the goals of the *Plan of Action on Youth Empowerment 2007-2015* (PAYE) (Commonwealth 2007) which built upon, and sought to create greater synergy with, the UN Millennium Development Goals and the Global Human Rights Agenda. For the PAYE (2007:12), a human rights-based approach to youth work involves the following elements: 'Express linkage to human rights; Accountability to all stakeholders; Empowerment; Participation; Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups'. The PAYE defines youth empowerment as 'both an end and a means' stating that:

> Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather that at the direction of others.
>
> (Commonwealth 2007:15)

Because of the Commonwealth's grounding, it has a clear aim to base youth work – as a professional practice – upon human rights through the development of agreed practice frameworks. That is, upon 'codes of ethical practice' informed by the UDHR and the Convention of the Rights of the Child, in order to raise the standards of youth work practice and thereby bring greater human rights outcomes to young people. Youth work as a recognised profession in the Commonwealth is dealt with by PAYE goal 12, point 12.3, which specifically calls for the youth sector to 'draft codes of professional ethics with express linkage to human rights'. It goes on to suggest that a critical pathway to developing the occupation of youth work and to delivering outcomes for young people should begin with the creation of 'a code of conduct to guide it, as well as structures to monitor and regulate it'. The most recent meeting of Commonwealth government Youth Ministers (CYMM) from across the 53 nations recommitted itself to the PAYE goals and to the development of the profession of youth work (Commonwealth 2013b). The various regions of the Commonwealth have taken up this challenge and begun its implementation. To this end, the Commonwealth recently released a 12-step guide to developing youth work that includes, as its final step, the establishing of codes of practice informed by international conventions such as the CROC (Belton 2012). The Commonwealth has also developed a 'road map' (Corney 2009) that explicitly sets out the process for developing a code of ethical practice for youth work in the Pacific based on human rights and other Commonwealth regions and countries are following these leads.

Young people, the youth sector and youth work: defining some terms

Young People

The Commonwealth acknowledges that what defines or determines what a young person is can be influenced by a variety of factors such as, culture, ethnicity and social context to name a few. However age is a dominating factor in any definition. The Commonwealth has adopted the definition of a young person as being aged between 15 and 29 years.

The Youth Sector

The youth sector is a part of the national social and human development framework. It comprises those agencies – organisations, programs and workers, government and non-government, paid and unpaid – who work with, or to the benefit of, young people as a significant part of their work. It includes volunteer and paid work in face to face youth work, management of service delivery, advocacy, research, training, evaluation and policy formation.

Those working in the youth sector possess a variety of skills, experiences and qualifications and the sector includes, but is not confined to, professionals who have formally trained in youth work. Most importantly, a significant proportion of the sector's work involves working with or to the benefit of young people (Health & Community Services ITAB, 1993, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004 and Sercombe 1997).

Youth Workers

'If we are to be of service to young people we are going to need to understand ourselves more as servers (servants) than authority figures; *we exist professionally to work with young people to develop their influence and authority, rather than merely to extend our authority over them*' (Belton 2012).

Youth workers work in a wide variety of settings in non-government organisations, for local governments, for government departments, for schools, for small community organisations and for large charities (Sercombe, 1997). Youth workers may undertake a range of service delivery functions as well as ancillary work such as policy, research and management; they are "an agent of change able to continually ask themselves certain questions – whether that is in the field or on a policy level" (CYP 2006).

Some people may argue that youth work is dependent upon qualification as a youth worker, and the Commonwealth certainly encourages all youth workers to be formally trained in youth work. However, currently a number of people employed as youth workers are not vocationally trained as youth workers and many have no formal qualifications. Therefore, youth workers are either trained as youth workers or they practice youth work (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004).

"Often, youth workers are perceived as those whose role it is to keep young people out of the way, provide recreation and fun for them and generally keep young people off the streets. There is little understanding and even less appreciation that Youth work is a distinctive field of practice and a highly demanding professional skill which carries with it considerable responsibilities and pressures" (CYP 2006).

Youth Work

Given the diverse range of work, training and expertise in the youth work field, it is difficult to arrive at a simple definition of youth work. However, there are a number of factors that make youth work unique (Sercombe 1997, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria 2004):

> Youth work is the only profession with a discrete focus on the age 15-29 Youth workers must have a specialist knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young people.
>
> Youth work considers youth in the context of broader issues and is not narrowly problem focused. Youth work considers the development of the whole person. Youth workers have a range of knowledge of generic and specialist community services such as law, health, schooling, etc.

Youth Work Values

Professions are founded on the basis of values. These values are broader than the codes of practice or rules of association that regulate membership, and are values that transcend the ever-changing context of day to day professional practice (Corney 2003; Fook, Ryan & Hawkins 2000). The Australian National Youth Work Training Project (Broadbent 1997) found that values were considered critical and fundamental to underpinning good youth work practice and are an area of training that youth workers said they needed in order to be able to work effectively. This includes "understanding what values are, one's own values, young people's values, community values, agency values, the values of other organisations and the impact of values on determining the approach to working with young people" (Broadbent 1997:6). Thus the inclusion of values in a code of ethical practice is imperative.

There are values that are quite specific to, and underpin, youth work practice (Corney 2003 & 2004). Drawing on the work of Sercombe (1997) we suggest the following:

- The young person is the "primary consideration" of the youth worker.
- Young people are seen in their social context.
- Youth work is holistic – it takes into account the whole person.

Commonwealth Youth Division and Youth Development Work

Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP).

The following is how the Commonwealth has recently described the role and focus of youth development work and the importance of a code of ethical conduct.

The way that young people and youth development programs are perceived in the Commonwealth has changed radically. This change must also be reflected in the field of youth work - those who work directly with young people - and youth work training. Young people are now seen as active partners. They are independent stakeholders who participate fully in the development process. For youth workers, this means that young people are no longer their 'clients' to whom they deliver a service. Youth workers now play the role of 'facilitators' rather than 'providers'. Youth workers and young people are partners who shape and chart the field of youth work together.

The Commonwealth has clear aims to reorient the youth work arena, to help raise the professional standards for youth work and bring greater recognition to and respect for youth work practice. They suggest that the critical pathway to developing the profession will be "creating a code of conduct to guide it, as well as structures to monitor and regulate it" (Commonwealth Youth Program 2006).

The Commonwealth - Key values

Since 1973 the Commonwealth Youth Programme has been offering training in Youth Development Work, based on this foundation of action-research. In this course the generic core competencies of youth workers are organised under three main functions.

Enabling is about creating the conditions in which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than relying on other people and especially professionals to do things for them.

Ensuring is about operating in accordance with the value systems which give a sense of purpose and meaning to how young people use their skills and knowledge.

Empowering is about putting democratic principles into action in the fullest sense, so that young people can play an assertive and constructive part in the decision-making that affects them at different levels of society.

These functions are not value free. They are rooted in the Commonwealth values and principles set out in the 1971 Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles and the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration. Specifically, these are democracy, *liberty*, *justice* and *equity* (CYP 2006).

A Code of Ethical Practice: draft guiding principles

Primary Consideration

Consistent with the UNCRC Article 1, the 'primary consideration' and constituency of the youth worker is the young people with whom they engage. Where conflicts exist between obligations to one young person and another, it is resolved in ways that avoid harm and continue to support the person least advantaged by the resolution (YACWA:4). (Please note: the term 'primary consideration' is not universally accepted. See the following alternatives – Primary client, partner, person, relationship, stakeholder, or agent. Also note the Commonwealth is using the term 'active partner' and/or 'Independent stakeholder' to convey similar notions).

Commentary

Youth workers often have a lot of people they answer to: funding bodies, peers, management committees, parents and communities. This clause, which we believe is at the core of the youth work relationship, keeps us in mind of who we are there for. Lots of people working in the field don't have the young person as their primary consideration, but see them as one of many stakeholders. That's OK: it just means they are not a youth worker. But young people need to know that there is at least one player in the game that they can rely on to uphold their interests (YACWA:4).

Social Environment

Youth workers recognise the impact of social and structural forces on young people. Their work is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person, but extends to the social context in which the young person lives (YACWA:5). Youth workers will particularly recognise that racism and cultural abuse are factors in the lives of young people and will seek to promote an environment which values their culture.

Commentary

Youth workers are agents of change in a variety of contexts, both with individual young people and also with the social systems that challenges or opportunities. As youth workers we want to be very clear that it is no use dealing with a young person in isolation. Young people (like all of us) are shaped, influenced, contained and to some extent controlled by the contexts in which they live. Young people are part of their communities and broader social contexts. This cannot be excluded from our approach to young people. It would be short-sighted to think that they can be dealt with in isolation, ignoring the complex myriad of influences all around them (YACWA:5).

Equity

Youth workers' practice will be non-discriminatory (YACWA:6). Youth workers work to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access to economic, social, and cultural resources (YAPA:1). Youth workers promote just and fair behaviour, and challenge discriminatory actions and attitudes on the part of young people, colleagues and others. Youth workers draw attention to unjust policies and practices and actively seek to change them (NYA: 6). Youth workers will understand that to deal with young people with equity means that their practice should be culturally appropriate and culturally competent.

Commentary

All young people regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, environment, association, background or sexual orientation, under Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Legislation, have the right to be treated in a fair manner that promotes equity and equality. This impacts directly on the youth workers' approach to young people. Regardless of youth workers personal beliefs, a young person has the right to be treated fairly and responded to on the basis of their need. If a youth worker is unable to detach their personal beliefs from a situation, then they have the responsibility to ensure that the young person is referred to a worker that is able to deal with their needs in a non-discriminatory and sensitive manner. The focus here is on responding to the young person's need in the best possible way (YACWA:6).

Empowerment

The youth worker seeks to enhance the power of the young person by making power relations open and clear; by holding power-holders accountable; by facilitating their disengagement from the youth work relationship; and by supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate claims. Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests (YACWA:7). Youth workers will understand that respect for self-determination is critical to their dealings with young people.

Commentary

The term 'empowerment' has become a bit of a buzzword, and as a result its meaning is sometimes not clear. For this principle, empowerment is thought of in ethical terms and what it means for us as youth workers. It therefore focuses on being accountable to young people.

In this context, 'empowerment' also refers to young people's ethical and responsible action; we presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests. We also, however, recognise that young people are at diverse and varied stages of development and need particular assistance and support at different times. It may be that an individual young person is not a good judge of their interests 'at a particular point in time'. They may be experiencing an episode of mental illness, or be in some emotional distress. We may find out about these sorts of things as we assess the situation, but the presumption at the outset is that young people know what they are doing. It is also important that we acknowledge

that risk, and taking risks, is a part of life. Young people need opportunities to take risks and learn from their experiences. It can be the role of a youth worker to support a young person through that process. However as youth workers, we need to be aware of and sometimes challenge the assumptions we hold about young people's competency in assessing and acting in their own interests (YACWA:7).

Duty of Care

The youth worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of harm or injury and strives always to uphold the motto of 'do no harm' in their practice. (YACWA:8) Youth workers will take responsibility for assessing risk and managing the safety of work and activities involving young people while being aware of the need to strike a balance between avoiding unnecessary risk and permitting and encouraging young people to partake in challenging activities (NYA:6). Youth workers understand that cultural abuse and racism are factors that harm young people.

Commentary

'Duty of Care' recognises that sometimes we may do more harm than good by intervening in a situation. We can get a bit fired up with our passion to help people, or to get things moving, or to use the skills and resources we have at our disposal, and it might not actually be the best thing.

If we are running an activity, making a referral, or engaging a young person in a program, we have a responsibility to make sure that the activity, referral or program is safe in general, and for the particular young person, and there will not be further harm that results from their involvement. Risk assessment and management needs to be thorough. Equipment needs to be well maintained, and staff need to be properly trained (YACWA:8).

We will exercise care in the employment of staff, whether paid or voluntary, full time or part time. Abuse of young people is not rare, and we are careful about who we give access to the young people we work with. Proper investigation needs to be made of people's work and criminal histories, even if they are volunteers (YACWA:8).

Corruption

Youth workers and youth agencies will not advance themselves or other stakeholders at the expense of young people (YACWA:9).

Commentary

We often think about corruption as just about money. This clause encourages us to keep ourselves honest in terms of our motivations and rewards, which may be about money but may also involve other things such as power, profile, emotional security, personal identity and so on. It is important to realise that this principle does not require altruism; in other words, we don't need to act with an entirely unselfish regard for the needs and interests of young people. It also doesn't mean that youth workers shouldn't do well out of their youth work. It is just that this cannot be at the expense of young people, so that young people don't do as well out of the youth work relationship as they would otherwise (YACWA:9).

Transparency

The contract established with the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful (YACWA:10). The youth worker will be open and honest with young people, enabling them to access information to make choices and decisions in their lives generally and in relation to participation in youth work activities. Youth workers will recognise that accountability to different groups may conflict and take responsibility for seeking appropriate advice and making decisions in cases of conflict (NYA: 7).

Commentary

We don't deceive young people, either by saying things that are untrue or by not saying things. This means that in initial meetings youth workers must be clear on what they can and can't offer. This applies to various areas of practice, agency policy and law. Whilst being open and truthful, workers should be mindful of issues of confidentiality, disclosure, health and safety, who the worker works for and what the agency is funded or contracted to provide. We also have a role in explaining to young people the nature of other stakeholders' relationships to them and the expectations this may place upon them (YACWA:10).

Confidentiality

Information provided by young people will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others who may use it against them. Young people should be made aware of the contextual limits to confidentiality, and their permission sought for disclosure. Until this happens, the presumption of confidentiality must apply (YACWA:11).

Commentary

Even where we think it might achieve good outcomes, we don't give names or other details to police, schools, or other agencies or anyone else unless young people have been made aware of why there may be a need to provide private information to others and their permission has been given. In accordance with National Privacy Principles we presume that young people expect us to keep their information confidential, even if that is about where they were and who they were with. Perfect confidentiality is of course not possible or even desirable: there are always limits especially to protect the safety of young people. We need to know what they are ourselves, and communicate and clarify them to young people at the onset of the relationship (YACWA:11).

Cooperation/Collaboration

Youth workers will seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people (YACWA:12). Youth workers will actively seek opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from other agencies (NYA:8), and will encourage young people and others to work together collectively

on issues of common concern (NYA: 6). Youth workers will particularly be conscious of the need to work with a range of services in order to secure positive outcomes for young people.

Commentary

Ethical youth work practice involves a commitment to co-operative partnerships with relevant service providers in order to collectively achieve positive outcomes in the best interests of young people. Interagency collaborative approaches enable a young person a greater range of choices in terms of support networks and access to a range of information, skills and resources to meet all their needs. It also enables a youth worker to expand their network to current information and available resources.

Working in deliberate isolation increases the risk of dependency-based relationships and denies young people the right to choice and an equitable share of available resources (YACWA:12).

Thus collaboration between workers is an essential component of ethical practice as it seeks to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people, even when competitive processes by Government often circumvent such outcomes by encouraging competition not cooperation (Hart 1992).

Knowledge & Skills

Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up-to-date with the information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people (YACWA:13). Youth workers also have a responsibility to undertake appropriate cross-cultural training with young people.

Commentary

Maintaining a level of competence through an ongoing commitment to being informed and skilled in relation to 'best practice' in youth work is essential. This is a standard requirement of most professions (YACWA:13). This includes recognising when new skills and knowledge are required, and seeking relevant education and training as well as seeking feedback from service users and colleagues on the quality of their work. Youth workers will only undertake work or take on responsibilities for which they have the necessary skills, knowledge or support (NYA:8).

Self Awareness

Youth Workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with respect (YACWA:14). Youth workers will make themselves aware of issues of cultural diversity and seek to be culturally competent in their engagement with young people from different cultural backgrounds.

Commentary

This means that youth workers will take into account the diversity of values, interests and perspectives that young people may present with, and recognise their own may be different in comparison. It is important that youth workers are self-aware and recognise and challenge their own prejudices, and cultural bias. Respect and dignity are crucial to being able to accept these differences between self and the young person, whilst also recognising that universally accepted concepts of human rights cannot be compromised (YACWA:14).

Boundaries

The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits (YACWA:15), recognising the tensions between developing supportive and caring relationships with young people and the need to preserve the boundaries of the professional relationship (NYA:7).

Commentary

Youth workers recognise the power differential that exists in the relations between youth worker and young person and that if misused can lead to exploitation. Youth workers will take care not to develop close personal, particularly sexual, relationships with the young people they are working with as this may be against the law, exploitative or result in preferential treatment (NYA:7). This means that youth workers will recognise that the relationship between themselves and a young person is a contracted relationship and therefore recognises the need to be non-sexual and limited (YACWA:15). This is particularly important in work with young people who have less access to knowledge, resources and skills than we do. Youth workers will also take care that behaviour outside work does not undermine the confidence, of young people and the public, in youth work (NYA:7).

Self Care

Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the health of youth workers (YACWA:16).

Commentary

This means that youth workers need to prioritise the practice of self-care; of looking after the self as a means to assure longevity of career and continued high quality service provision to young people. The level of benefits to the worker from adequate self-care practice will be congruent with the level of benefits to the young people we work with (YACWA:16).

Integrity

Youth workers are loyal to the practice of youth work, not bringing it into disrepute. Youth workers will respect the strengths and diversity of roles other than youth work (YACWA:17).

Commentary

For youth workers, this means that they are aware of their role and the expectations this places upon them from themselves, other stakeholders, and from young people. Whilst undertaking a role that may be different from others, youth workers will value and respect difference in other approaches. Through continuing to portray youth work in a professional manner, youth workers will be mindful to not act in a way that can bring their role into disrepute (YACWA:17).

Ethical Awareness

Youth workers recognise the importance of continuing reflection and debate and view this statement of ethical principles as a working document which should be constantly under discussion (NYA:8 & 9).

Commentary

Developing an ethical awareness means to be aware of the standards of ethical practice around youth work. This means familiarising yourself with the code of ethical practice and having the ability to utilise the code within your work practice. It requires developing awareness of the potential for conflict between personal and professional values, as well as between the interests and rights of different individuals and between the ethical principles in this statement. It is also about being prepared to discuss difficult ethical issues in the light of these principles and contributing towards interpreting and elaborating on the practice principles (NYA: 8 & 9).

Youth workers should also ensure colleagues, employers and young people are aware of the code of ethical practice and be prepared to challenge colleagues or employing agencies whose actions or policies are contrary to the principles in this statement. Ethical awareness is also about re-examining these principles, engaging in reflection and discussion with colleagues and contributing to the learning of the organisation where they work (NYA:8).

Anti-Oppressive Practice

Youth workers will work in ways that are non-discriminatory and ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted in all of our agencies, projects and events. Youth workers will have an understanding of oppression, the ability to recognise oppression and how it operates in the lives of young people (Mullaly, 2002). Youth workers will contribute to enabling and encouraging young people to understand, value, respect and celebrate their own and others' cultural backgrounds and choices (Warwickshire County Council, 2006).

Commentary

Youth workers understand that oppression is not a static concept, but a dynamic and relational one (Mullaly, 2002). They will help to counter the economic and political marginalisation of young people by encouraging them to find and use their collective voice.

Youth workers will contribute to enabling and encouraging young people to understand, value, respect and celebrate their own and others' cultural backgrounds and choices. Youth workers will work in ways that promote the bringing together of young people of different ethnicities, faiths, cultures, nationalities and sexual orientations so that they can celebrate what they have in common as well as learn about their differences in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Youth workers will assist young people to understand the effects of power and prejudice in society and the effects of discrimination and social exclusion on different groups in society. Youth workers will work with young people to challenge and oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all other forms of discriminatory oppression (Warwickshire County Council, 2006).

Social Justice

Social justice is a primary motivating value for youth workers (Crooks, 1992). Youth workers will initiate structural social change and work with the symptoms and causes of social conflict.

Commentary

Youth workers clearly link the idea of social justice to a particular conceptualisation of the notion of youth (Corney 2004). This conceptualisation defines youth as socially, economically and politically marginalised and disadvantaged. Youth workers see young people as suffering particular political, social and economic inequalities as a result of age primarily but also as a result of class, ethnicity, belief, sexuality, gender and ability.

This is strongly supported by a chorus of voices from the sector literature: Benjamin (1989), Crooks (1992:20), Brown (1992:16) and Outten (1992:8) to name but a few. As Mary Crooks (1992:20) clearly states, 'social justice' is the core value of youth work. As such, youth workers will reject victim-blaming and amusement practice paradigms and support both individual and collective consciousness-raising to change unjust social structures (Brown, 1992:6).

Gary Outten, of the Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia, suggests that to enact social justice principles youth workers will take a "...holistic approach to the social, political and economic wellbeing of young people". And will use value frameworks that enable "...social and political action amongst others" (1992:8).

Participation

Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship (Hart, 1992) and as members of our society, young people have a right to participate in decision-making (Broadbent, 2006). Youth workers will work towards the active engagement of young people in all areas of society, and will facilitate processes where young people can participate and have a voice. Youth workers will ensure that the process of engaging young people in agencies, projects and events is NOT tokenistic (Ife, 1995; Kenny, 1994).

Commentary

The term participation is used here to refer to the process of sharing decisions which affect young people's lives and the life of the community in which young people live. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured (Broadbent, 2006).

Young people have rightly learned to look on the notion of participation with some scepticism, as they are consulted and informed about decisions but in effect have very little or no power to affect change. Young people have a right to sit at the table and participate in decisions about the present and the future. Youth workers understand that young people become involved because they believe they can collectively change things. Youth workers will therefore work in ways that actively promote the non-tokenistic engagement of young people (Kenny, 1994; Ife, 1995).

Roger Holdsworth (1999) has developed a three-way test for measuring the authenticity of active participation. He suggests that any project involving young people's active participation should be able to show that:

- it has value to young people - that young people chose or constructed it and see its relevance to their interests;
- it has wider value in the community - that it is meeting real and purposeful community ends;
- it has added value - it meets or exceeds mandated or legislative objectives.

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