youthfocus NW

Curious Minds

The impact of Youth Focus North West in Greater Manchester 2017 - 2023

Mini Report



Based on a full report by

Steph Hawke PhD

Contents

Introduction	03
Methodology	04
Hypothesis	05
Findings	06
Youth Work (Greater Influence and Capacity)	08
Youth Work (Greater Value and Quality)	10
Youth Voice	14
Youth Leadership	15
Mechanisms, Features,and Characteristics	16
Conclusions	18
Overall Impact Findings	19



Since 2017, Youth Focus North West (YFNW) has developed a network of relationships across Greater Manchester with both adults and young people. This report was commissioned to better understand the work of YFNW in influencing programmes that develop work around youth voice and youth work. It is expected that the findings will be used to influence discussions about infrastructure and connectivity when further developing Youth Voice/Youth Work.

The body of the report is in 3 sections:

01) The first section examines the impact of YFNW's work in Greater Manchester.

02) Next, the data is interpreted using the theory of systems change. Themes emerging from data analysis are presented as a theory of change model specific to YFNW's impact in Greater Manchester.

03) The third section presents the characteristics of YFNW's work as they emerged by coding the qualitative data in themes. These are described as the active ingredients, or mechanisms, by which YFNW has achieved change in Greater Manchester.

Methodology

The impact evaluation follows a qualitative methodology. Twenty-one interviews were conducted. The interviews are supplemented by a stakeholder survey and a focus group. Interviewees are anonymous and are labelled with a unique identifier when quoted throughout all the research documents.



Hypothesis

In 2017, YFNW was afforded the opportunity to focus a percentage of its work in Greater Manchester when it was awarded the commission to deliver the Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority (GMYCA). As a result, YFNW has gained a more significant presence in Greater Manchester.

Since then, YFNW's portfolio across Greater Manchester has grown and continues to play a pivotal role in decision making by sitting on a number of influential groups and boards serving the young population of Greater Manchester.

The evaluation is to explore the following hypothesis:

By having an increased presence in Greater Manchester since 2017, YFNW has contributed to the growth of youth work with a particular focus on youth voice work across Greater Manchester.

YFNW in Greater Manchester

YFNW has had a long-term presence in Greater Manchester, supporting the Youth Work sector as an infrastructure organisation that aims to develop youth work practice and bring people together through networks and partnerships, ultimately to improve the lives of young people. This was explored through the lens of five focal points, described below and elaborated within the main report.

- **Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority (GMYCA)**
- **Youth Voice – Embedding in GM Systems**
- **Lundy Model**
- **Workforce Development**
- **Youth Alliance Greater Manchester**

Findings

The impact of the work of YFNW in Greater Manchester since 2017 can be described in four areas, each of which are taken in turn in the discussion below:

- **Youth work (greater influence and capacity)**
- **Youth work (greater value and quality)**
- **Youth voice**
- **Youth leadership**





Youth Work

(Greater Influence and Capacity)

Qualitative data confirms that in the period since 2017, the capacity for youth work in terms of the understanding of what it is and why it is needed, is perceived to have increased across Greater Manchester, with more dedication of funding, staff time and resources.

Respondents described a growth in youth work as a profession, with more qualified and recognised youth workers.

This impact is described below using the following themes or categories:

Partnerships and Collaboration

YFNW has facilitated greater partnership and collaboration between youth organisations across Greater Manchester.

"(It's) something that we missed a decade ago, which is why the cuts came. That understanding of why youth work is so valuable, so important, but also what it can do for local authorities is vital" (VSCE2).

Training Programmes and Professional Development

YFNW was seen to have offered professional development opportunities that have increased the number of skilled and qualified youth workers across the 10 authorities and grown the capacity of organisations to deliver quality youth work. The impact of YFNW *"in ensuring that there is a skilled and qualified workforce" (VSCE2)* was seen as significant: "*in the past four to five years, we've seen in Manchester alone, an explosion of training for Level 2, Level 3 Youth Work qualifications" (VSCE2).*

Improved Readiness

YFNW was perceived to support organisations to be more ready for youth work, through increasing knowledge and skills: *"they were able to get across to a group of voluntary sector organisations that don't directly work with young people, the importance and power of youth voice" (VSCE1).*

Connected to this was the impact of the work of YFNW in cultivating the next generation of youth workers, *"ensuring that young people have an opportunity to learn how to be youth workers, not getting social workers or teachers into the profession, but truly recognising that this is a good career path, and it's a valued career path" (VSCE2).*

Championing the Values of Youth Work

YFNW has acted as a champion for the values of youth work and as an advocate for investment in the field. This was perceived to have resulted in more funding and funding-bids focussed on the rigour and principles of youth work, rather than in diluted or tokenistic forms: *"YFNW is kind of just holding on to youth work practice that has developed over decades and isn't being cared for, they're an organisation that is holding onto these practices" (HEI2).*

Flexible and Dynamic Approach

YFNW has significantly influenced youth work capacity in Greater Manchester since 2017. The mechanisms for this success lie in the flexible and collaborative approach that is characteristic of YFNW and a leadership that has been firm in, to use the phrase of a respondent, *"holding the candle" (HEI2) for true youth work values.*

Stakeholders reported a clear increase in the amount of youth work within their sector since YFNW began exerting its influence in 2017. Respondents were less able to speak for Greater Manchester more widely and this is reflected in the stakeholder survey responses.





Youth Work
(Greater Quality and Value)

The impact of YFNW's work in Greater Manchester since 2017 can also be felt in terms of attitudes and behaviours in relation to the quality of youth work provision and the way in which youth work practice is valued. This can be seen as a better understanding of the quality of youth work and as a consequence, more investment in that quality. Respondents also reported greater consistency in youth work practice across the 10 authorities. Youth work is better valued with more awareness of what quality youth work looks like, and recognition of its importance.

Awareness and Quality

Respondents said that youth work has achieved a higher profile within organisations with better awareness of youth work and a better understanding of what quality looks like, *"This meant that more money was coming in to deliver youth work in its purest form. Rather than youth work through sport or youth work through music" (VSCE2).*

Collaboration

By facilitating opportunities to share and collaborate, YFNW has made space for ideas and practice to be shared, leading to improvements in quality: *"Youth Focus North West has helped to bring youth workers and young people together to increase collaboration (in) projects between the region(s). The quality of youth work, in the sense that youth workers and young people could learn from one another, see what was going well – maybe someone was struggling (and) another area could give advice. So, in terms of acting as a facilitator to bring people together, that is helpful" (YCA2).*

Professionalisation and Qualifications

YFNW has contributed to increasing the quality of youth work across Greater Manchester by providing opportunities for those individuals who are delivering youth work (whether they are trained as youth workers or have found their way to youth work from another discipline) to undertake training and to professionalise through qualifications. As this respondent explained: *"…training for youth workers had not been present in Manchester for about a decade; we worked with Youth Focus North West to put a training package in place for third sector partners, so that we had skilled and experienced youth workers. And that's increased qualified youth workers by about 60% so it's massive" (VSCE2).*



Youth Voice

YFNW has in many ways undertaken its role as an infrastructure organisation in Greater Manchester, supporting workforce development and mechanisms for youth leadership. What respondents found more remarkable about the work in Greater Manchester, however, was YFNW's innovative introduction of Professor Lundy's Model of Youth Participation and the cross-sector advocacy for its adoption.

Data suggest that as a result of YFNW's efforts, there is more youth voice in decision making and young people are having real influence at a policy level in Greater Manchester. There are more youth leadership roles and more development programmes for young people.

Advocacy

YFNW has championed the importance of youth voice and ensured youth voice is a priority across Greater Manchester's services and strategies: *"they've been really good at not being judgemental, they've always taken an approach that something is better than nothing" (NHSM1).*

Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority

YFNW played a key role in the development of GMYCA, which has provided opportunities for youth voice and influence in key decision making. *"The quality of youth work required was not originally fully acknowledged. It's easy to understate the importance of good quality youth workers. At the beginning of the journey, GMCA didn't really get the point of youth workers, there was an idea that the officers of the Combined Authority could just facilitate it because they've got the experience of minuting meetings and creating agendas. That doesn't lend itself to the creative processes that are required for (the) genuine innovation and ideas generation that youth work (and the methods [of] Youth Focus North West) achieve" (YP2).*

Young Leaders Improving Services

YFNW has amplified youth voice across Greater Manchester by connecting young leaders to service improvement. For example, in the Heath Service, YFNW has opened up a dialogue with young people through initiatives such as Young Inspectors and Bee Heard, helping services to incorporate the perspectives and lived experience of young people: *"We've got some really good structures that YFNW have set up through the Bee Heard Forum. That means we've got regular access to youth voice and lived experience, whereas before it was ad hoc" (NHSM1).*

More Meaningful Youth Engagement

Youth Focus North West has moved partners forward, progressing their understanding of youth engagement away from tokenistic forms of consultation: "The framework that they've put in place and the opportunities, it's been done so professionally, there are monthly meetings, and young people set the subject matter. It's been fantastic" (NHSM3).



Youth Leadership

In terms of youth leadership YFNW's impact can be described in terms of:

- More opportunities
- Growth in youth leadership
- Championing youth leadership
- Cross-sectoral support

More Opportunities

YFNW generated more opportunities for youth leadership in Greater Manchester: *"When you've got a Greater Manchester Mayor that places value on young people, it makes a massive difference across ten boroughs and more opportunities – just because Youth Focus North West has got that contract with GMCA, they're bringing in - … opportunities that we wouldn't have had" (VCSE2).*

Growth in Youth Leadership

YFNW has played a key role in the growth of youth leadership in Greater Manchester, with young people progressing from engagement as young leaders in programmes such as the GMYCA and Young Inspectors to taking paid leadership roles in youth organisations: *"we've also seen that with some of the initiatives around homelessness and inclusion. I think that impact is down to Youth Focus North West" (VCSE2).*

Championing Youth Leadership

Through its contribution to steering groups and boards, YFNW has advocated not just for youth work and youth voice, but for youth leadership, *"(YFNW) made sure that we were in the right conversations for health, for education, for finances, so that we can make sure that those barriers for young people who want to be leaders are eradicated" (VCSE2).*

Cross Sectoral Support

YFNW has bridged gaps between sectors to provide impartial support for young leaders. YFNW workers are *"all able to build good, positive, long-lasting relationships across the sector and with young people. So, in a lot of cases, for me, they bridge the gap between the different elements of the sectors" (VCSE2) "YFNW is the go-to organisation for parts of the Greater Manchester system, but it also has a collaborative style when working with other organisations across GM, e.g. in health services, local authorities, or other VCSE organisations" (Survey Respondent).*

Living Systems Approach

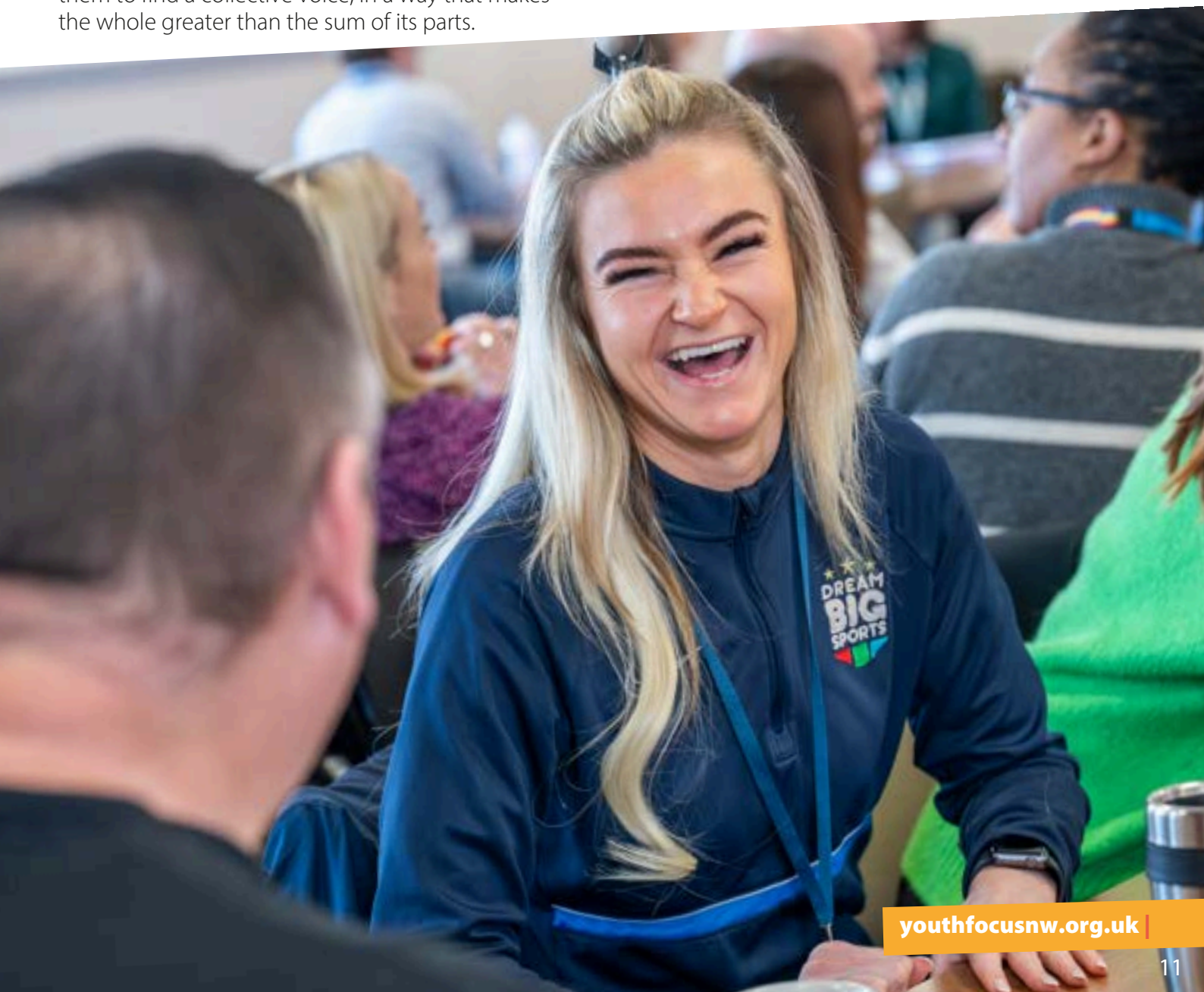
The stories collected from individuals as part of a qualitative data collection exercise suggest that YFNW has operated as an agitator or catalyst for systems change within parts of Greater Manchester's public and VCSE sector.

YFNW can be seen as operating through a living system that starts with the young person in their community in Greater Manchester. Operating across this system YFNW has had conversations, made connections and planted ideas at different levels: community, local authority, and social services.

This can be seen to agitate at national level: through the work on the Lundy Community of Practice; and through the model of good work set by the GMYCA; and, in some broader European partnership project work, the ripples are international. At all these levels, YFNW is consistently pushing for change. It has brought workers together as advocates, helping them to find a collective voice, in a way that makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

"change – from a Living Systems perspective – works best when pushing simultaneously at different levels." (Abercrombie et al, 2015)

The scope of this impact review has been to investigate impact for youth work, youth voice and youth leadership across Greater Manchester. These lasting changes are presented in the full report through a Theory of Change model that illustrates specifically how YFNW has achieved its impact in Greater Manchester.



Mechanisms, Features and Characteristics

In their accounts of the impact YFNW has achieved in Greater Manchester, respondents consistently referred to their experience of the character of YFNW's work. Analysis of the data suggests that in understanding the impact of the work, it is important to consider not just what changed, but how that change was made possible.

Data describing those mechanisms were coded, generating four areas or themes that characterised the work of YFNW, with subcategories exploring the beneficiary-experience within each of those themes. Interview respondents described ideas that were categorised as the following mechanisms:

I. Facilitating & raising voices
II. Convening & networking
III. Advocacy & tenacity
IV. Training & capacity building

Facilitating and Raising Voices

The quality of YFNW's approach to its work was described as principled, robust and with integrity. The organisation is seen as holding on to an enduring set of values, especially during a decade or more of severe contraction of youth work nationally. Features emerging from data coding are summarised and discussed below:

- ***Legitimacy***
- ***Principled and persistent***
- ***Authentic integrity***
- ***Facilitating rather than leading***
- ***Embedding***
- ***Purposeful youth voice***
- ***Independence***
- ***Determination***
- ***Galvanising***



Convening and Networking

Respondents valued YFNW as an organisation that brings people together to make connections and build relationships. Themes emerging from interview data are summarised and discussed below:

- ***Brokering and bridging***
- ***Seizing opportunities***
- ***Convening***
- ***Networks and connections***
- ***Multilingual***

Advocacy and Tenacity

Respondents described the impact of YFNW in terms of a tenacious advocacy that foregrounds authentic and meaningful youth voice, and rigorous professional youth work practice. Interview data were coded as follows:

- ***Influence***
- ***Flexibility and tenacity***
- ***Value-added***
- ***Excellence***

Training and Capacity Building

As a sector support organisation, YFNW exists to build the field of youth work. Respondents described an organisation that is "always there to lend an ear" with a mission to build a skilled and qualified workforce. Interview data were coded as follows:

- ***Bursaries***
- ***Accessing knowledge***
- ***Representation***



Conclusions

This report discusses data collected from 20 interviews, a focus group and survey. Analysis used a constant comparison approach until 'saturation' was achieved and there were no further new themes to be identified. This analysis has informed a suggested Theory of Change that illustrates the impact of the work of YFNW in Greater Manchester. Respondents described the mechanisms that characterise YFNW's interactions in affecting that change, these can be seen as the 'active ingredients' in the theory of change.

The Conditions for Success

YFNW was ready to take the opportunity that the context in the City-Region from 2017 presented. There was a new Mayor for the Combined Authority and a growing interest in the lived experience of service users at policy level. YFNW supported young people to campaign for what became the GMYCA. Since then, YFNW has developed focused work in Greater Manchester, building relationships with health, local authorities, the police and higher education institutions and achieving an impact for the quality of youth work, knowledge, skills and understanding of youth voice and for the development of youth leadership.



Field Building

Through networks and relationships, knowledge and expertise, evidence and youth voice, YFNW has supported individuals advocating for youth voice to exert influence upon their organisations. When organisations become committed, they influence



their wider sector or systems, and so the impact of YFNW interventions can be seen to influence lasting change in Greater Manchester.

Mechanisms

Respondents were also able to describe the features of the work of YFNW that characterise the organisation and are the mechanisms by which it is effective. It was possible to group these mechanisms alongside four key activity areas: facilitating and raising voices; convening and networking; advocacy and tenacity, and training and capacity building.

Respondents experienced YFNW as legitimate, principled, persistent, authentic and with integrity, facilitative, embedding change, developing youth voice work that is purposeful, determined, independent, and galvanising. YFNW skills were described as lying in brokering, bridging, seizing opportunities, convening networks and making connections. The organisation is influential, flexible, tenacious, adds value and is a standard of excellence. It represents young people and engages in sharing knowledge.

Overall Impact Findings

- There is more capacity for youth work and the case for youth work is exerting greater influence.
- Youth work is better valued and of better quality.
- Youth voice is of greater priority.
- Youth Leadership has been championed.

This report concludes with the words of a young person, that captures the mission and value of YFNW's work in Greater Manchester:

"You just need belief that your voice holds power and go out and use it. And that for me is what Youth Focus North West has always been. It's adults and young people who come together to see that young people's voices hold power and want to ensure that is facilitated, valued and supported and cultivated" (YCA2).



youthfocus NW

youthfocusnw.org.uk

follow us

Youth Focus NW is registered in England & Wales as a Registered Charity No. 1125563
and a Company Limited by Guarantee No. 6486517.

Registered office - Unit 6b | Micklehead Business Village
St Michaels Road | St Helens | WA9 4YU