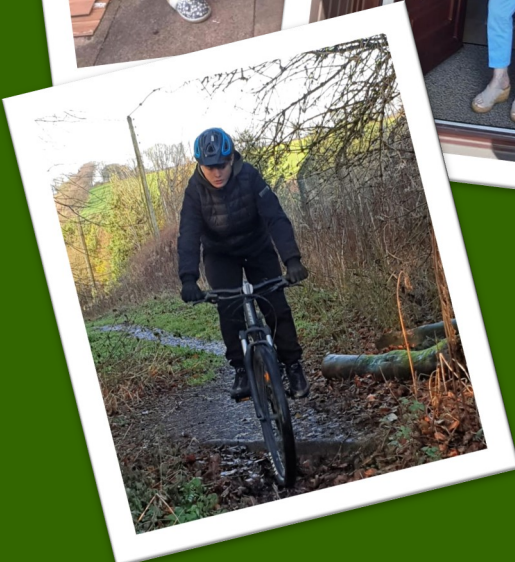


Annual Report 2020/21



2020/21



What a Year!



WLYAP Annual Report 2020/21

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Foreword

Welcome to the Youth Action Project Annual Report for 2020-21.

As for all organisations this has been an extremely challenging year; however as a service that prides itself with the ability to respond to adversity, the Board of Trustees supported the staff team to adjust services to respond to the needs of not just young people but a wider sector of West Lothian's most vulnerable people.

As the impact of the Pandemic became apparent, the need for access to essential provisions and safe places for children of key workers and those most vulnerable was quickly identified. The team worked in Partnership with W.L. Council Social Policy staff and others to support the "Safe Space Initiative".

The team, including several volunteers worked relentlessly to ensure that food and essential items were delivered safely to identified individuals and families throughout West Lothian, for whom the Pandemic hit hardest. The partnerships formed during this work were tremendous and has led to us to form new connections for future collaborative working. One of the positive things evident from the Pandemic is the strength of community spirit, on behalf of the Board of Trustees I would like to thank all community members, businesses and organisations who gave donations and time to support our vital work this year.

In addition, our core services such as streetwork were maintained when restrictions allowed. A number of young people struggled with Lockdown periods. Our teams supported Police Scotland and other emergency services to minimise youth disorder and most importantly ensure that they were advised on how to keep safe. A number of young people received individual support, as described later in the report, to alleviate anxiety, reduce stress in households and to improve levels of health and wellbeing.

We have been fortunate in attracting a new member to the Board, Michele Doull, who joined us this year. Michele's experience will add huge value to the organisation. Unfortunately due to the Pandemic, it has not been the best year to recruit a new Chairperson for the organisation; this will be a priority for the Board during the coming year.

Huge thanks for the commitment of my colleagues on the Board and to all staff and volunteers who have made such an impact on vulnerable people's lives.

Janice Turner

Treasurer

What a Year!

As we have heard so many times, phrases like “we’ve never experienced anything like it, unprecedented times, Lockdown again”, set the scene for the year.

The severity of the situation we were in resonated through the staff team of the Youth Action Project as soon as the Pandemic was announced. The team and partners in West Lothian Council Social Policy team and other third sector organisations worked together to form the Safe Space; creating safe play spaces for children of key workers or those at risk and the provision of food and essential produce to families most isolated or vulnerable.



With agreement from our Board the Youth Action Project staff and volunteers, who without we would not have been able to operate, immediately discussed how we could restructure our work and help those most vulnerable in our communities. The decision was taken that we would work in partnership with W.L Council on the Safe Space Initiative and with security of additional funding, we would extend support of food provision to people of any age group, not just young people and families, if identified by referring agencies as vulnerable and in need. Our knowledge of West Lothian Communities and agencies soon led to requests for support with prescription collection and delivery, arranging access to clothing, essential household items cookers/ beds and meal deliveries.

Operating within strict Covid -19 safety guidelines, we collected food produce from a huge variety of places, with many donations from supermarkets such as Morrisons and Tesco, to whom we are very grateful. During the spring, the constant negotiation with suppliers for food was relentless, but despite supply constraints, many shops and wholesalers were so generous and supportive. Once produce was collected, our team operating as a “bubble” worked tirelessly with our colleagues in Social Policy to pack and deliver food and essential items to families involved in the Safe Space Initiative, or those referred from a plethora of third sector organisations, schools and other sections of WL Council.

280 - 300 parcels were delivered weekly, with an average of £30-35 of produce included, much higher value for larger families; with over 600 different individuals and families receiving the service throughout the year.

We were very glad to become part of the West Lothian Food Consortium supported by West Lothian Council, a collective group of organisations addressing food insecurity. The consortium secured funding to supply fresh produce to community organisations involved in the consortium and developed a network of communication, helping us all work closer together.

In addition to the food parcels, we provided two course meals to an average of 50-70 people per day during April – September 2020, working in partnership with West Calder Development Trust, to whom we would like to extend our sincere thanks. I also need to acknowledge and praise our experienced cook, Kathleen Ward, whose tenacity and perseverance made the meal provision such a success

We had so many expressions of appreciation, a couple of examples below:-

Colette Murray, Head teacher (in 2020), of Murrayfield Primary School in Blackburn - one of the highest areas on the SIMD areas in West Lothian,



"Can I thank you and your team for the amazing support you have offered our families over the last few months. You have all been so kind and generous and all the families have said how much they appreciated your help".

One elderly gentleman - who preferred not to have his name mentioned in the report but was happy to have his feedback comment used stated:-

" I can't thank you enough, this prescription delivery is vital to me, without it I would end up in hospital and I'm so scared of that with this virus - thank you so much."

We also received many thank you cards as the image shows.

The core work of the organisation changed significantly during the Pandemic, with a proportion of the W.L Voluntary sector grant funding being diversified to support children and communities in a different way but still within the parameters of the organisations governance procedures. The core funding was supplemented by a substantial Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund award, secured by the organisation for over £41,000. This fund allowed us to continue the essential deliveries to families through the summer months. In addition to this award we received several donations, such as the STV Appeal and Carmondean Church Committee, which combined, amounted to £55,000 additional funds generated by the organisation to help some of the most vulnerable people in West Lothian.

My colleagues and I never in our careers would have expected to become a food distribution service, but on a serious note, it was a very humbling and rewarding experience. The doorstep conversations, were at times as important as the food, we were able to provide information, useful contact telephone numbers and online sites. Many conversations were very personal, people were scared, lonely, confused, frustrated, worried about money, struggling to deal with their children and home learning – so many areas!

The Youth Action Project staff and volunteers are experienced people, with PVG Disclosures, issues discussed were handled sensitively and any areas of concern shared with appropriate agencies with the consent of the individuals in accordance to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Most importantly we listened to people's stories and concerns, but it was certainly not all sadness, we had some great laughs and met some amazing characters throughout West Lothian during this "What a Year".

Helen Davis – Project Director

Individual Support Work and Streetwork

The commitment and heart of the organisation continues to remain the support to young people in our communities of West Lothian. Despite our extended support services during the Pandemic, project staff worked with a substantial number of young people on a one to one basis throughout the year. We identified that a number of our known contacts were really struggling with Lockdown conditions and many had very poor mental health. Our partner agencies also informed us of situations where tensions in some households were causing serious concern. In response to these difficulties we carried out risk assessments, took advice from national youth work agencies and consulted our local Police Scotland colleagues prior to developing supported cycling, walking and environmental sessions to assist in alleviating these issues.



Safe sessions outdoors where young people were able to speak to a trusted adult and take part in physical exercise were as one mother stated “an absolute lifeline, without this support I think the household would have exploded out of control – thank you so much”.

The project team involved in this work deserve huge recognition as essential frontline workers.

Figures below do not include the many young people supported remotely.

Numbers of individuals supported - 82

Total number of sessions – 592

Streetwork is a fundamental element of the Youth Action Project service provision, West Lothian Council have for many years recognised the value of this function, providing funding for us to provide a targeted detached youth work model, working closely with the Community Safety Partnership. The team operate predominantly from Thursday to Saturday; however, this has been a flexible service during the Pandemic, responding to need and when restriction guidelines allowed us to carry out the service. Although a lead is provided by the Community Safety Partnership regarding the areas that would benefit from streetwork interventions, we respond to our own local knowledge and information from young people and community members when planning our service delivery.

As stated previously a number of young people, much the same as some of the adult population, found it too difficult to comply to COVID -19 restrictions or did not understand the severity of the situation. This was particularly difficult during the warm summer days.

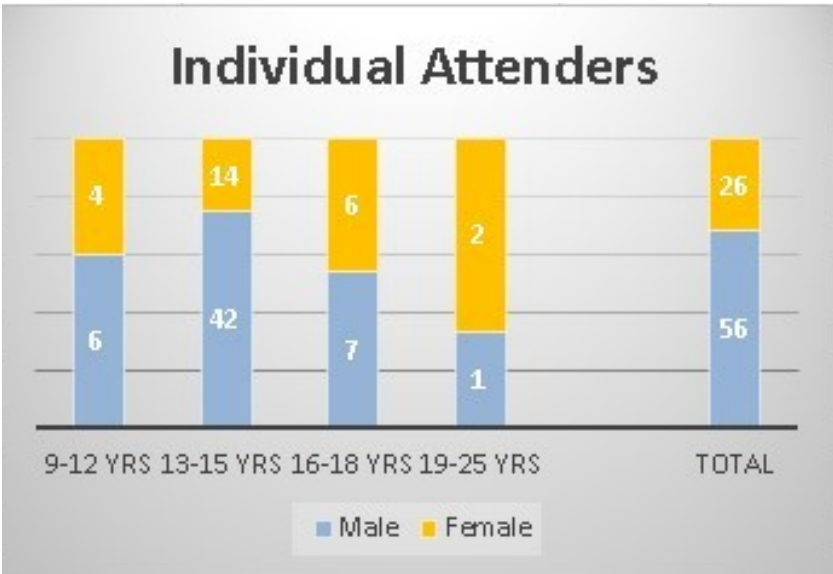
The streetwork team, along with partners, worked directly with young people gathering in public places, providing information, advice and arranging individual support for those if required. As with the individual support, risk assessments were carried out and national guidelines adhered to.

No. of young people engaged - 906

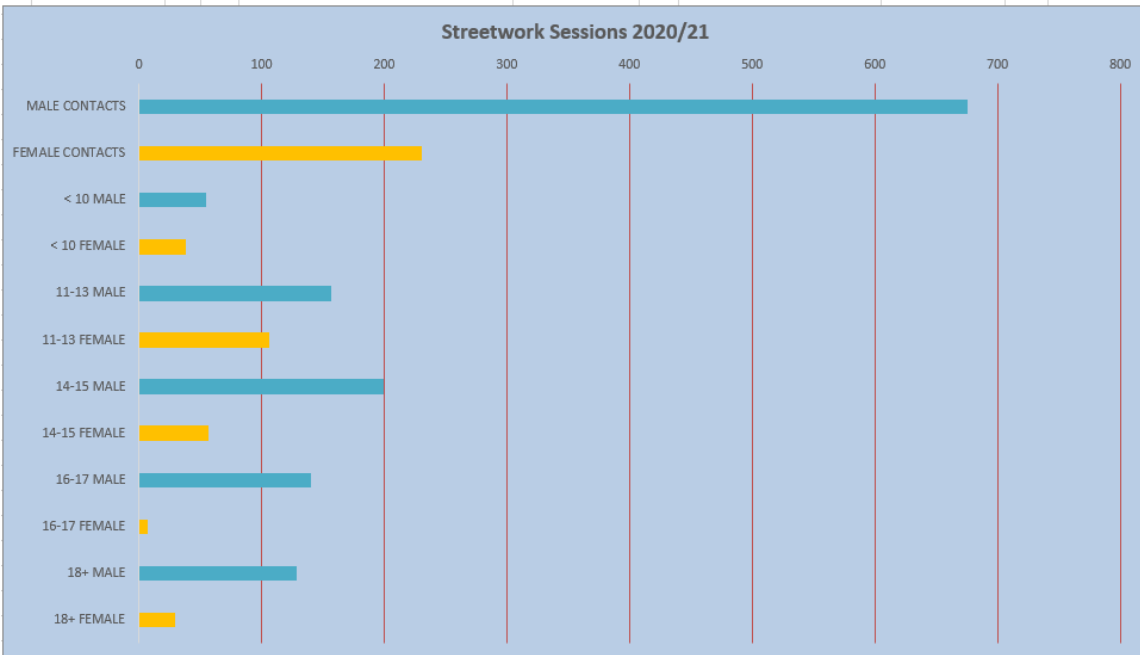
No. of sessions - 87

Statistics

Male / Female comparison for group and 1 to 1 sessions



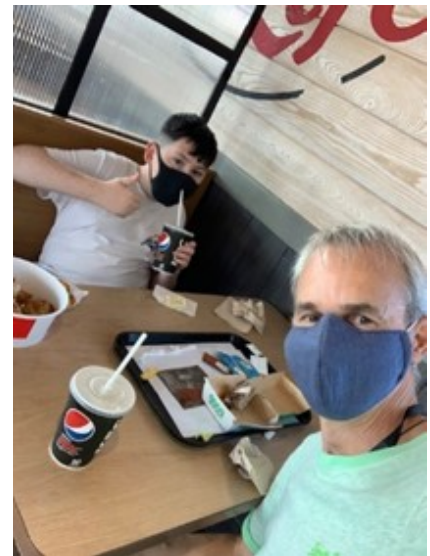
Streetwork Engagement



Befriending during the pandemic

I would never have thought that a distance befriending session would have involved trying to help my young person tune his guitar over facetime! However, in these strange times, befriending has been a bit different to what had initially expected. And similarly, I suspect it has been the same for my young person, Kieran.

I started befriending just over a year ago now and, throughout this time, I've managed to maintain continuous contact with Kieran through a combination of distance and face-to-face sessions.



Kieran & Ally

When restrictions have allowed, we have enjoyed walks around my young person's neighbourhood, games of football in the park and long hikes or cycles down to McDonald's for some tea. As restrictions have eased, we have recently started to venture out in the car instead of walking and hopefully we can soon do some more varied activities.



Ally & Kieran

All of the face-to-face sessions have felt very 'safe' with both of us obviously sticking to the various COVID guidelines. It has definitely helped that Kieran has been very sensitive towards any concerns I've had around close contact and always insists on wearing his mask even although at times this has not been a requirement.

During our 'normal' virtual sessions, we have chatted, played games, pulled funny faces and chatted some more. In a couple of more creative sessions, we have tuned his guitar and spent time drawing – well, I have mainly watched him drawing as he is exceptionally creative and in one particular session drew some of his own cartoon characters!

Sometimes our calls can last as little as ten minutes but on other occasions we can be chatting away for more than an hour without realising that the time is passing. This has probably been helped by the fact that we both like to chat!

Sometimes our calls can last as little as ten minutes but on other occasions we can be chatting away for more than an hour without realising that the time is passing. This has probably been helped by the fact that we both like to chat!

I have to say that the success of the continued contact throughout the uncertainty of the last year has been largely down to Kieran being willing to engage in phone and video calls as well as both of us adjusting our expectations and being flexible.



Kieran's artwork during a remote befriending session

Even if we haven't been able to do some of the more traditional befriending activities throughout the pandemic, we have been able to get to know each other well and build a strong and positive relationship.

Ally (Befriender)

Partnerships and the Move Forward

This has been a year with an ever changing landscape, which could be viewed as all negative, we would like to turn the negative aspect into a positive one, as the way in which partners have worked together to tackle adversity and inequality has been amazing. The speed and capacity to respond to the needs of our most vulnerable members of the community have been so diverse and far too many to detail; however we wish to acknowledge our appreciation to:-

West Lothian Council for core financial support as in previous years; this year however, our frontline Partnership work with members of the Social Policy team has achieved so much, the challenges and the laughs will stay with us for many years! Close links with Education, Regeneration team, CLD Youth Service, Housing Services, Youth Justice and many others have led to wrap around support for vulnerable young people and families, something we do not want to lose as the pandemic eases. We aim to continue our involvement as active members of the Wellbeing Recovery Group and Community Safety Partnership and other key strategic groups.

Third Sector - the service response, communication level and efficiency within the third sector was incredible; as a member of the Third Sector Strategic Group and Chair of the Children & Families Forum, the mutual support, advice and partnership work displayed was vast. It demonstrates the skill we have in adapting to situations no matter how extreme, the professionalism, ability to work on the ground and to involve our communities in providing what is needed for them is extremely high. The strength of the third sector has been recognised by West Lothian Council and the Scottish Government during the Pandemic, as we move forward we need to capitalise on this improving relationship. Voluntary Sector Gateway and the Social Enterprise Network will act as linchpin organisations moving these developments forward; the Youth Action Project will continue to be active members.

We acknowledge particular appreciation to all agencies involved in the Food Consortium, with whom we continue to address food poverty and inequality throughout West Lothian, West Calder Development Trust and the Larder for meals provided and much more; Community Action Blackburn, a well - established and flexible partnership providing a community support service, food poverty provision and sustained community improvements for the residents of Blackburn; Craigshill Good Neighbourhood Network , Daisy Drop In, Craigsfarm Community Hub and the Transform Craigshill Community Action Group working together to improve the quality of life for those living in Craigshill.

The Youth Action Project as part of West Lothian's ever strengthening third sector are striving together, moving forward from the Pandemic; developing strategies, joint funding applications and realistic practical services.

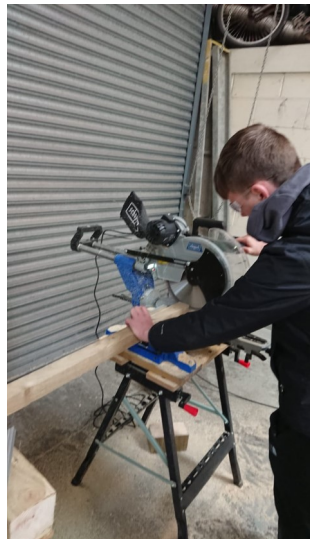
In addition to support from Local Authority and the Third Sector, we wish to thank the National Lottery, Life Changes Trust Team for their continued support as we enter the last phase of this valuable project. The opportunity for care experienced and vulnerable young people to still take part in safe cycling and music sessions, has hugely improved their anxiety levels, improved confidence and relieved boredom. Almond Housing Association for their enthusiasm and support with the Scottish Government funded Investing in Communities Partnership Project - Growing Together, which despite the pandemic has adapted to respond to the needs of the Craigshill community.

Reference has previously been made as to the positive relationship our organisation has with the Community Safety Partnership colleagues, Police Scotland, Lothian & Borders Fire and Rescue Service, WLC services etc. Communication has been very effective this year both remotely and during community based initiatives, despite the pressures on available resources.

The Youth Action Project recognises that poor mental health, poverty and uncertainty of the future will be areas we need to focus on as we recover from the pandemic. Our individual support, training programmes, youth groups and streetwork will all be more effective by working with partners but most importantly will be meaningful engagement with young people, families and the communities of West Lothian.

Growing Together

GROW, COOK, EAT, SHARE



Board of Directors

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year were:

Ryan Addison
Janice Turner
Helen Wilson
Andrée Carruthers
Nichola Clark
Mark Weigt
Ian Colquhoun
Michele Doull

In addition, the following individuals acted as advisors on the Board and provided support to the organisation.

Cllr. Peter Heggie
Beverley Akinlami
Jock Kerr – Honorary President

Thanks to our sponsors...



West Lothian Youth Action Project

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