

Annual Report

2019/20

“So What?”

Contents

Foreword

“So What?”

Services Provided

Groupwork Sessions and Individual Support Statistics

Streetwork Statistics

Partnerships

Life Changes Project – Creative and Active Futures

Quotes & Statements

INtegr8 Befriending Service

Playscheme

Music Services

Board of Directors

Foreword

Welcome to West Lothian Youth Action Project's Annual Report for 2019 – 2020.

As for many third sector organisations in West Lothian and further afield this year has seen a reduction in grant awards from local authorities, the significant cut of 26% from West Lothian Council to the Youth Action Project lead to a necessary restructure of staffing levels, reduced hours and sadly a small number of redundancies.

As Trustees for the organisation it is always a very difficult decision to reduce staffing levels as inevitably this has an impact on the level of service delivery. We are extremely grateful to the staff team, some of whom voluntarily reduced their working hours to assist the overall budget of the organisation.

Despite the reduced resources, the Board and staff team have worked together to ensure that the services delivered to the young people and communities of West Lothian continue to be provided at an excellent standard. The organisation strives to ensure that some of the most marginalised young people in West Lothian are supported through a wide range of interventions, ever adapting to the complex lives that a number of these young people and families experience. Individual bespoke support packages, groupwork and training programmes, activities and of course an opportunity to have fun, all assist in the improvement of mental health and wellbeing, a reduction in involvement in anti-social and challenging behaviour and raised aspiration levels for many young people.

The generic youth drop-ins and detached streetwork ensures that the Youth Action Project maintain their excellent relationships with not only young people but a wider network of community members. The partnership working will provide us the opportunity to move away from grant funding alone and will increase the capacity to secure funds through a social enterprise model and commissioning routes.

I would like to thank our outgoing Chairperson, Ryan Addison on behalf of all Board members and staff team for his excellent steer and direction of the organisation this year; he will remain a valued member of the Board. We will actively pursue the appointment of a new Chairperson and other new members to the board during 2020-21, which may prove to be a challenging role given the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic at the later stages of this reporting period.

Despite the challenges, I and the Board acknowledge the dedication and commitment to the young people and communities of West Lothian displayed by our staff team, always adapting to current needs as I am sure they will during this difficult period ahead.

Janice Turner - Treasurer

“So What?”

As Project Director of the Youth Action Project for many years, I struggled a little this year to put a theme to our Annual Report, however, my mind wandered into a reflection of my job and a question asked at a conference a few years previously “So What?” I share this overview of the year with you, reflecting on the work of the organisation and the differences we make to young people and communities of West Lothian. I was reminded of the inspiring, if at times challenging, young people and their families that we have had the opportunity to build close working relationships with over many years; they all help us adapt and thrive as an organisation.

All Service Managers, Fundraisers and Board members will recognise the frustrating hours spent writing a variety of funding applications, all different in format but one common theme in them all, is the requirement to evidence the difference made to the service users. We come up with the most inventive names for the programmes that we deliver, trying to recreate and re - invent approaches that have been tried and tested in order to attract funding. However creative we are, the fundamental question we need to remind ourselves of frequently is “So What?” What is actually being achieved by the work? Are the young people benefiting, if so how? How many have learned new skills? What worked to improve a young person’s mental health? What actions really helped that community?

There are so many ways that we can evidence the benefits of youth work both targeted and generic but they are not always conventional, nor should they be as diversity is essential when working with young people and communities. There are a snapshot of photographs and feedback comments from young people within this report. One of our aims in the coming year is to use social media more effectively to highlight the tremendous efforts of young people, volunteers and staff.

Engagement and partnership working with community based groups is imperative to our organisation, work with young people in isolation is not as effective as linking it into community based services, a holistic approach creates the most positive long lasting results.

The “So What” question can also be applied to the wider strategic plan for organisations from the mission statement, expected outcomes, what data to collect, through to operational management. The new West Lothian Council Children’s Service Plan is being developed in 2020; this will focus on the difference/ improvements achieved. We and other third sector organisations through the Children and Families Third Sector Forum will be included in the development of this plan.

With a substantial cut in the grant funding from West Lothian Council this year, the Youth Action Project could have just substantially reduced services, cut staff and given in to financial pressure. We did have to make some painful decisions, and reduce staffing levels, we are extremely grateful to colleagues who agreed to reduce working hours.

We are however, a resilient team and the demand for services continues to rise, therefore we have strengthened our partnerships in order to attract funding out with the Local Authority for our communities, such as the partnership with Almond Housing Association securing funding from the Scottish Government Investing In Communities Fund for the “Growing Together Project”. This is an example of our intention to diversify and broaden our work in supporting the wider communities without detracting from high quality service provision to young people.

We sadly recognise the increase in child poverty, low income families and poor mental health as key concerns in communities, the addition of our Community Fridge service in Craigshill plays a part in the wider network of organisations working together to address food poverty. The organisation is adapting services with immediate effect working in partnership to assist with the current crisis.

By working even more effectively together, third sector organisations can and do make a real difference, improving health and well - being and the lives of vulnerable people. The pandemic will challenge us all, fear of the unknown will impact in very different ways, but our team will be working with you.

Helen Davis
Project Director



Services Provided

Streetwork/ Detached Youth Work

Early Intervention – 1-1 Support

Practical Skills Training

Community Environmental Projects

Music Services

Community Fridge & Food provision

(Extensive development from March 2020 in response to COVID -19)

Befriending Service (INtegr8)

Youth Drop-ins

Youth Participation

Bespoke Groupwork

Summer Play scheme (Craigshill)

The Youth Action Project prides itself on the ability to respond to current needs impacting on young people and our communities of West Lothian. The services listed above are not exhaustive, some are provided under a Service Level Agreement with West Lothian Council, others funded through other grant based sources or through the developing Social Enterprise aspect of the organisation.

The diverse, committed staff team continually review and adapt their work in response to the identified needs of young people and ever increasing family complexities. Our partnership work remains vitally important and at the end of this reporting year, the emergence of the pandemic is immediately evidencing the strong partnership working ethos within the third sector. An additional strength of the Youth Action Project is also the wider collaborative work with the Local Authority, National Youth Agencies, NHS, Emergency services and Business Sector. This breadth of strong relationships will be paramount with the current emerging challenges that we all face.

Groupwork & Individual Support

One of the strengths of the Youth Action Project is the versatility and ability to create groupwork programmes for young people who often struggle to maintain mainstream school. During 2019-20 we have worked in close partnership with several West Lothian high schools, providing identified young people with the opportunity to take part in joinery, basic landscaping, bike maintenance and music programmes amongst others. The practical skills learned are a stepping stone into further education or employment opportunities. In addition, young people develop trusting relationships with staff who assist them to manage their successful transition into adulthood.

At times individual sessions are needed for young people to address complex challenges and behavioural difficulties. Early and Effective Intervention work has many benefits and manifests itself throughout our services. The earlier supports can be put in place the higher the success rate, however, we always strive to provide support to young people or signpost to other services if we do not have the expertise.

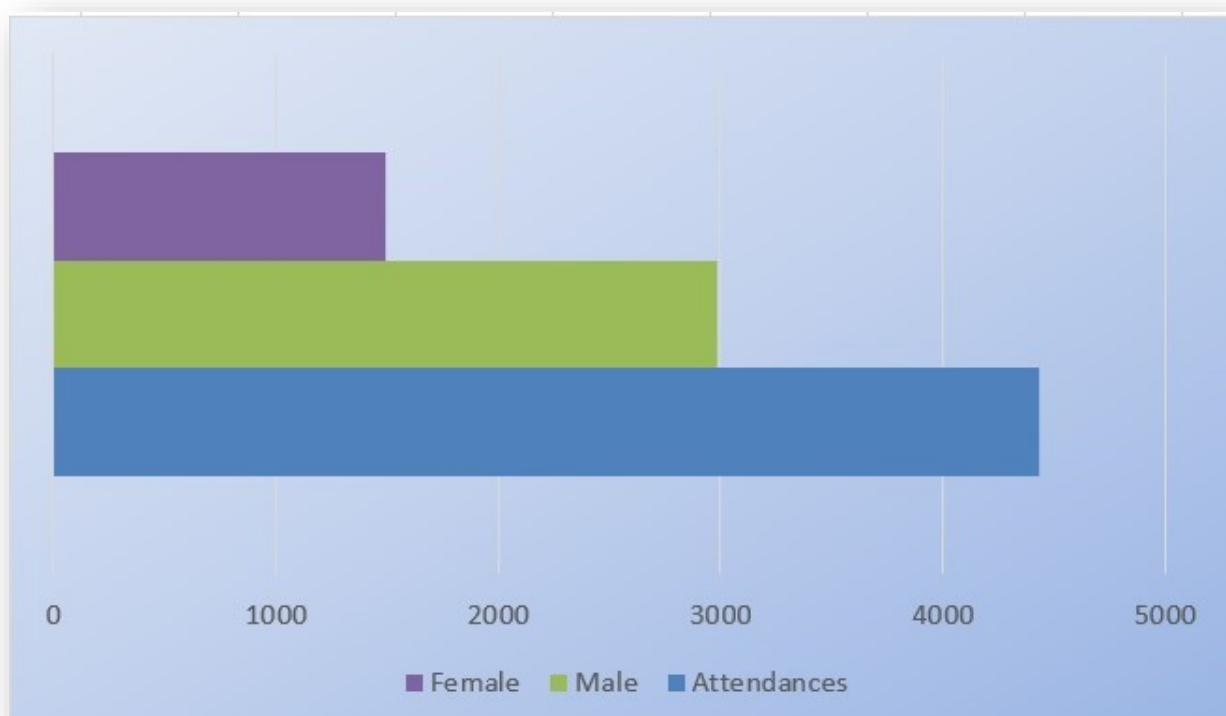
Our groupwork programmes are generally commissioned, we work closely with referrers to design bespoke programmes to best suit the needs of the young people.

Individual referrals are received from screening groups, EEI, NHS, CAMHS, Schools, third sector agencies and self - referrals. We are working with an increasing number of young people experiencing poor mental health and associated diagnosed conditions. The staff team have been involved in Mental Health First Aid, Building Confidence and Resilience, Suicide Prevention training, to name a few areas of knowledge the team use within their work.

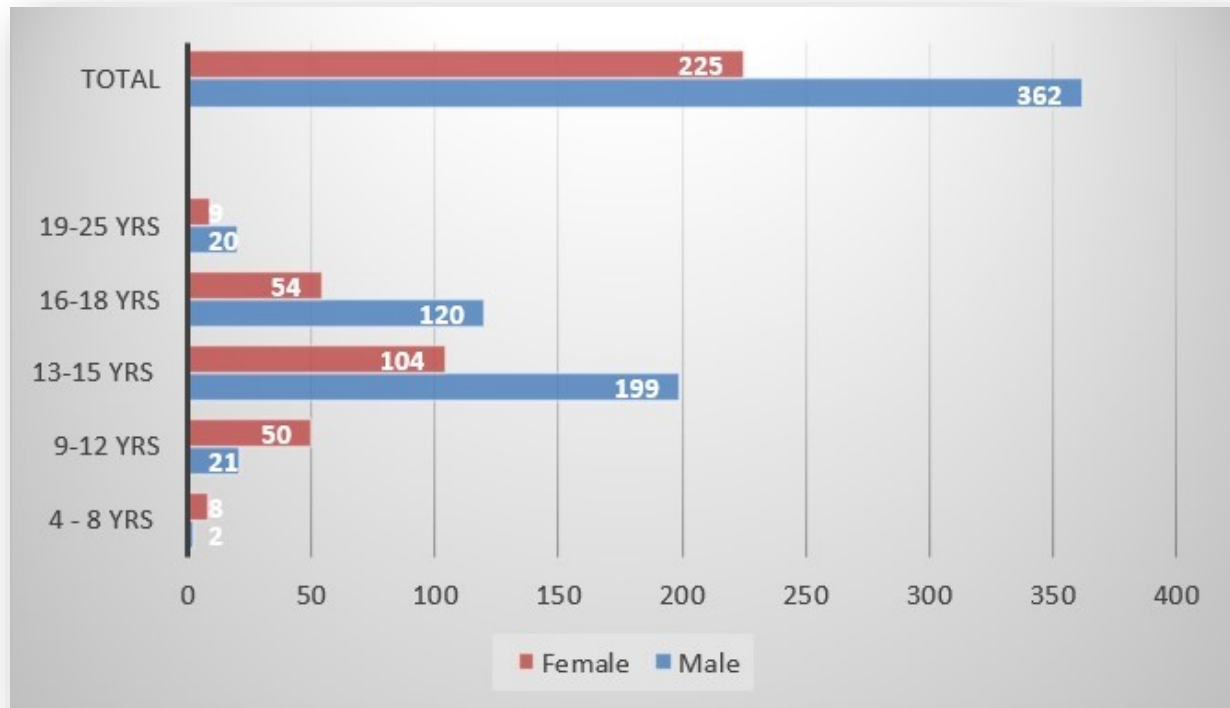
On writing this we are already recognising the impact the pandemic may have on the mental health of the whole community. We will utilise our skills and flexibility to provide the necessary supports as this situation unfolds.

The following graphs provide attendance details

Overall Attendance



Individual Attendance



Outcomes - What difference does it make?

A selection of feedback comments from service users

The following comments from a small sample of young people tells their experiences – we welcome feedback as it helps us adapt our work and demonstrates that we can help change things for the better.

“I hated school, the group taught me that I had good practical skills, I can learn and it gave me the confidence to apply for college – I’m there now and doing well – Thanks so much”.

“I didn’t realise the harm that my Facebook use was causing, it took over my life, the bullying was really scary! You helped me try different things to occupy my time, helped me believe in myself. I’m feeling so much better in myself, but I know you are all there when I need you.”

“Without YAP I’d be in the jail, the path I was on was crazy, I thought nothing could touch me, you stuck in with me, that must have been hard! I’m doing well now, decent job, good missus and magic wee boy – Cheers guys”

“Sometimes the workshop was freezing, the work was knackered but it was a good crack, I enjoyed it and learned a lot of things that will be useful when I get my own place. Only annoying thing was that I could only attend 1 day a week”.

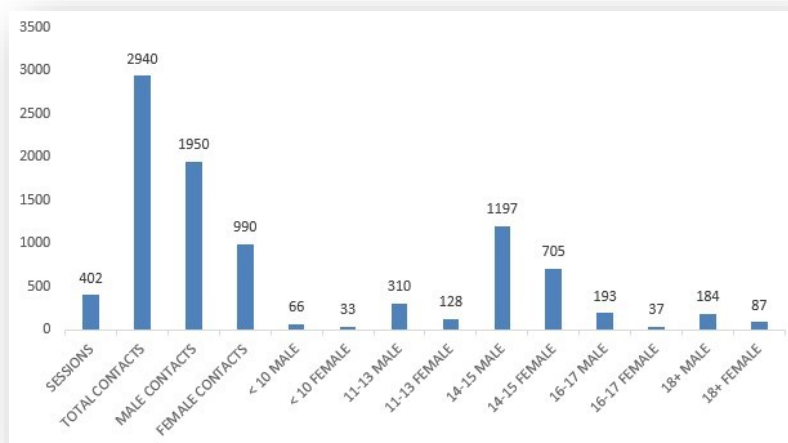
Streetwork *Detached Youth Work*

The Youth Action Project's core roots lie with streetwork, a detached youth work approach to engaging with young people in their own communities and on their own terms. This is not an area that all youth workers enjoy, but for some of us it is an absolutely vital way of real engagement with young people and communities. It is unpredictable – sometimes challenging with the Scottish weather but if you embrace the approach it is easy to evidence the value.

We have a two level approach to engagement with young people, one linked to the Community Safety aspect – following up on information from Police, Housing, Local Councillors, environment officers etc. detailing any concerns in West Lothian communities relating to youth disorder. We are contracted to carry out this work as part of our annual funding agreement with West Lothian Council in conjunction with the Community Safety Partnership.

In addition, our team are all youth workers and will always use the opportunity when out and about to meet young people, check in with them on a range of matters and gain valuable insight into the trends and patterns of substance use, any gang/ territorial issues, general concerns and at times on the positive note just to engage with young people as a friendly, informative and supportive service. We also take the opportunity to listen to shopkeepers, businesses and local adult residents who may report concerns relating to young people.

Number's Engaged (Only numbers of young people directly communicated with are recorded) – **2940**



Number of sessions held – **402** (These do not include additional shifts carried out under other targeted pieces of work e.g. Blackburn / bonfire night etc. - these are recorded independently).

Issues addressed – substance use, education and employment, risk taking behaviour/ anti-social behaviour, relationships – with family friends/ school, police etc. The list is lengthy.

Once again, as evidence for many years, YAP engage with a far higher number of young men on the streets of West Lothian

Top 5 geographical areas requiring streetwork intervention in 2019-20

Bathgate

Blackburn

Livingston Centre

Broxburn/ Uphall (combined)

Fauldhouse



Partnerships

The Youth Action Project would not achieve as many successes without the close partnerships that we have established with many organisations over the years – of course this is not always easy – good communication, adaptability and hard work is required to ensure that partnerships work. We have always worked closely with our emergency services and will continue to do so. 2019 – 20 has seen our continued and improved links with Education, both mainstream and with the Skills Centre. We provide targeted bespoke packages of support to referred young people who struggle with mainstream school for many reasons.

Our partnership with the National Lottery – Life Changes Trust has allowed us to support some of the most vulnerable or care experienced young people with new opportunities and skill based learning. With activities such as cycling, bike maintenance, joinery and basic landscaping, photography, personal care and make up sessions etc. This work has further developed our links with WLC Families Together team, Social Policy and third sector partners.

The continuation of the Early & Effective Intervention process keeps us in close communication with WLC, Police and Education Child Protection Officer and ensures that as a service we effectively contribute to the reduction of criminal activity and antisocial behaviour displayed by a minority of young people in West Lothian.

The Youth Action Project continue to be a key third sector agency in West Lothian representing the third sector on steering and strategic groups, also chairing the Children and Families Third Sector Forum. It remains vitally important that YAP continue working with locally based agencies such as Community Action Blackburn, Transform Craigshill and the local regeneration groups, the local knowledge assists us to respond where possible to the needs of young people and communities.

Independent relationships are also formed with other corporate businesses, such as Almond Housing Association, with whom we have successfully gained partnership funding to develop and roll out the “Growing Together Project”.



At the time of reporting our organisation is rapidly working very closely with third sector partners, such as Craigshill Good Neighbourhood Network, West Calder Development Trust, WLC Social Care and anti – poverty teams, NHS – particularly Craigshill Health Centre, Fare share, WL Foodbank, Almond Housing and many others to respond to the crisis facing many due to the emerging pandemic. Although the impact at this stage is unknown, I have no doubt that the strong partnerships within West Lothian will ensure a safety net is established to ensure everyone is supported through the coming months.

Our continued thanks go to our established partners and we welcome the opportunity to developing further links.



Life Changes Project *Creative and Active Lives*

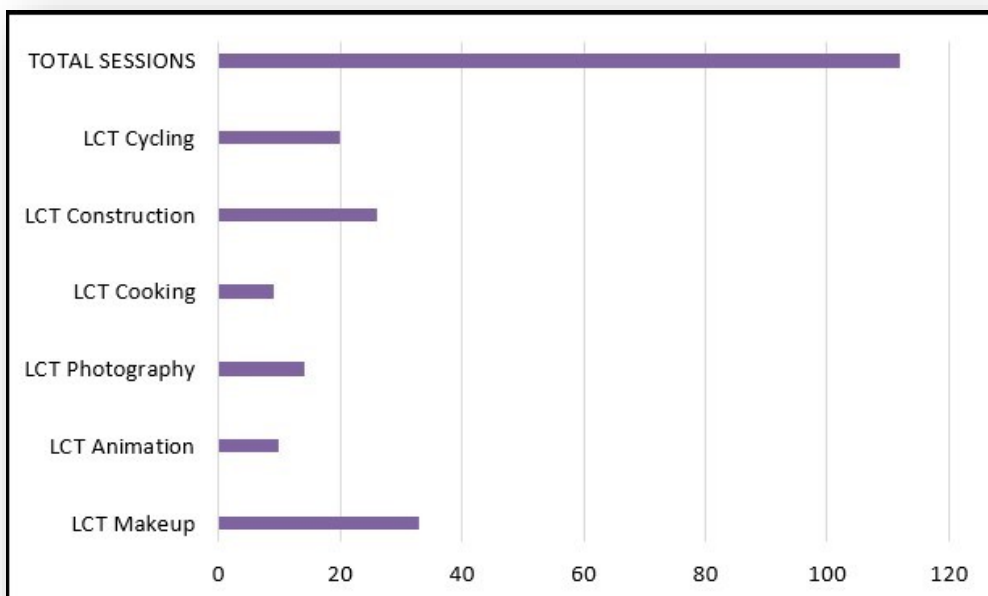
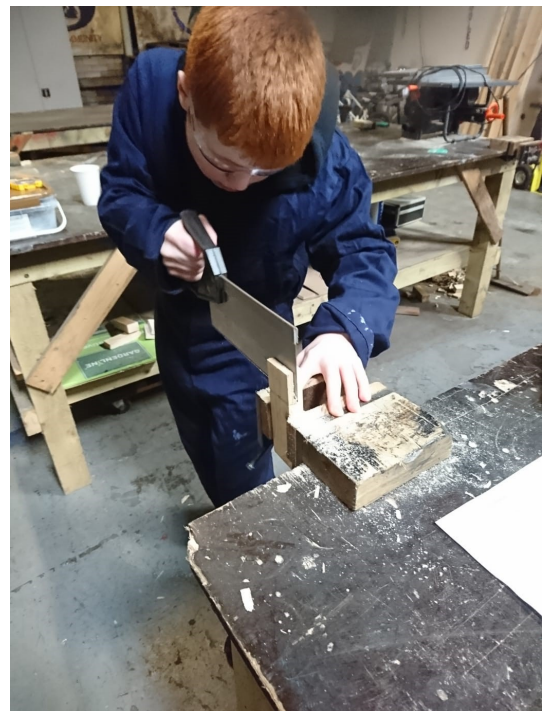
West Lothian Youth Action was awarded funding by the National Lottery to support young people with care experience and those most vulnerable to increase their social networks, skills and improve their health and wellbeing.

Working in partnership with West Lothian Council Arts Services and West Lothian Youth Action Project, delivering the 'Creative and Active Lives' Project.

This project aim is to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of young people with care experience across West Lothian, by engaging them in a supported, person centered programme of creative, active and group-based activities. The project also provides a platform for them to have a voice and to create opportunities to influence future improvements.

Young people were consulted and asked if they would like the opportunity to be active and have fun outdoors, develop their interests and try out new things in areas such as cooking, cycling/bike maintenance, make-up masterclass, construction, photography, music, and arts & crafts.

As a result of engagement with this project, young people have improved their physical and mental well-being, through being given the opportunity to express and articulate both their individual views and their experiences.



Quotes & Statements *Life Changes Trust*

I never thought I would be able to do the make-up workshop at the event and was really nervous to talk to strangers and do their make-up, but I am really proud of myself because I managed to do it and was really buzzing afterwards. I had a great day and would love to attend more events like this.

(Young woman 16yrs)



Being part of LCT courses has given one of our pupils so much confidence, she has even started speaking up in groups; which she was always too shy to do before. The courses and staff have helped give her a focus— she has become so much more organised in her day-to-day life. She has now developed a good school routine and has matured greatly; she is thriving both at school and socially.

(Pupil Support—Education)

My granddaughter has really enjoyed attending the course which helped her attendance at school. Her concentration also improved slightly too. She was nervous when first attending but the more she attended the more confident and comfortable she became thanks to the type of course and the staff who supported her through it.

(Grandparent, Young woman 15yrs)



I have participated in a cycling programme which involved learning to maintain my bike and exploring new cycling routes in West Lothian. I enjoyed being outdoors and learning how to maintain my bike and will continue to explore other cycle routes.

(Young Man age 15yrs)

INtegr8 Befriending during the Pandemic

During these unusual times, we would like to introduce Ally, INtegr8's newest member of the befriending team, and currently our only volunteer to have gone through the complete matching process 'distantly'. Due to the pandemic, Ally and the young person he was matched with did not physically meet until restrictions eased enough to allow it. Instead, they initially built their relationship by phone and video calls. More recently, they have been able to include socially distanced face-to-face sessions in between video calls when weather and government restrictions allow. Here's what Ally has to say:



"My name is Ally – I'm new to befriending! I'm in my early 50s, married and a parent. I decided to become a volunteer befriender as I'd always wanted to try and make a bit of a difference within my local community. I'd also seen some stuff on social media saying that organisations were specifically looking for men in my age bracket to volunteer, so that gave me extra confidence to take the step forward.

I finished my initial induction training just before the lockdown started. I'd been all prepared for face-to-face contact but then found myself undertaking Befriending Networks' new interim volunteer training course to get ready for distance befriending instead. With all my training complete, I was remotely matched and started on my journey with a young person. Whilst distance befriending was a different start to the relationship to what I was expecting, I think with hindsight it was a very useful way to get to know my young person. The initial Befriending sessions involved weekly video call contact (often up to one hour long), which gave us a chance to chat and get to know each other in an environment that was very different to say a 'traditional' face-to-face session/activity. I have been lucky in that my young person was able and keen to engage in video call sessions relatively easily (we are both chatty!) so that definitely helped pave the way to get to know each other and build a good foundation to the relationship prior to meeting up.

As government restrictions eased, we moved towards face-to-face contact and I believe the initial distance sessions helped greatly with our first few meet-ups. Given that the activities we were able to undertake were relatively restrictive (e.g. walks, football, McDonalds), a lot of our time together involved conversation so the fact that we had already spent time engaged in video calls made this easy.

In summary, I think a blend of distance and face-to-face contact has worked really well for me and my young person and currently gives us the flexibility for continuous contact as restrictions fluctuate in these uncertain times."

INtegr8 Befriending during the Pandemic ...continued

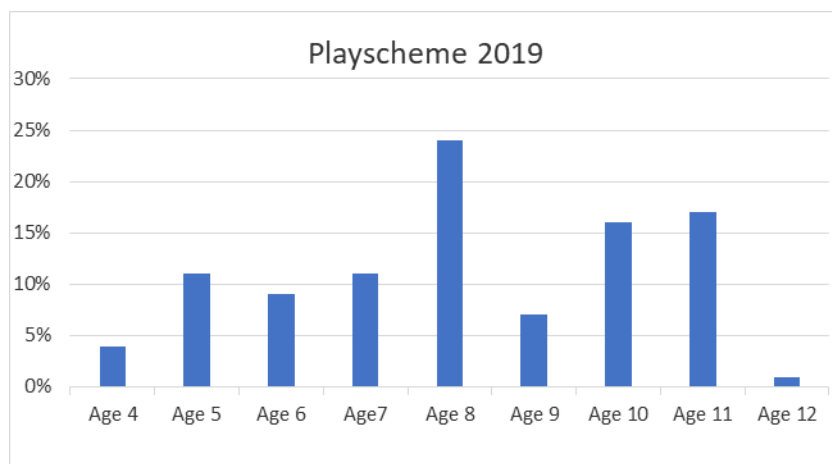
Service statistics – April 2019 to March 2020

- 14 enquiries logged into the waiting system
- 26 enquiries from community members exploring volunteering opportunities
- 7 volunteers participated in befriender training
- 21 young people received 1-1 support
- 13 trained and vetted volunteers provided befriender support to young people

Summer Playscheme

The WLYAP Summer Activity Playscheme took place from 08/07/2019 to 01/08/2019. 55 families and a total of 70 children registered to benefit from the scheme with an average of 25 children taking part in each session.

WLYAP engaged both the young people who took part, and their parents/carers to find out what they liked best and found most beneficial about the scheme as well as their views on developing the scheme in the future. Staff and volunteers who supported planning, delivery and evaluation of the playscheme were also invited to provide feedback. (Summary evaluation available on request)



Originally, it was volunteers who provided this service for the local Craigshill community but now it is run by a team who have gained vast experience of working with children and young people over many years, both from the Playscheme and from running Youth Action Groups.

Volunteers still help, of course, and are invaluable to the successful running of the Playscheme. Many of these volunteers are young people who previously attended, as children, and now gain enormous experience, confidence and certificates from the Saltire awards for their CV's.

Our main funder is West Lothian Council who for the third year running provided free lunches which were enjoyed and appreciated by all those who took up the offer of them.

The buses for our trips were generously subsidised by E. M. Horsburgh, allowing us to take many of the families to our favourite places, as well as some new ones. This year's trips were North Berwick, Burntisland, Kelpies and East Links Park.

Music Services



YAP music offers workshops and tuition sessions for young people with an interest in informal music.

This project has a 19 year history of providing quality tuition on guitar, bass, drums, keyboard, DJ skills and song writing. Participants have also gained skills in planning gigs/events, involved in promotion and marketing and had the chance to perform at live events. We support young people from the age of 12 - 21 years, any skill levels from absolute beginners to intermediates in a safe, supportive and friendly environment where they are free to be creative.

Our services offered:

- ◆ **Weekly Drop In Music Club**
- ◆ **Summer Music Academies**
- ◆ **School Groups**
- ◆ **Taster Sessions within existing Youth Groups**
- ◆ **One 2 One sessions**
- ◆ **Partnership Projects**



Many of the young people who attended Yap Music have moved on to study music at Collage and University, gained recognition of their work through Youth Achievement Awards, Millennium Awards.

Some young people have returned as volunteers and paid staff members.

Music Services ...continued

Recently I've been very fortunate, and I feel as though I'm entering a new chapter in my life. After a long uphill battle with my mental health, I feel quite secure in myself for the first time in about five years, and I'm ready to begin sharing my experiences and using them to (hopefully) help others. It's become increasingly clear to me the importance of that, and though I hold no reluctant sense of obligation, I feel a purposeful sense of duty to others and I'm excited to see where this new chapter takes me.

It's due to recent changes such as this I feel equipped now to really immerse myself in work such as volunteering for great causes like YAP. I always felt I had a home there, even during some of my darker days, and I cannot express enough my gratitude towards all the amazing people at YAP, who work so tirelessly and selflessly to inspire young people.



Band-wise, I couldn't be happier, and I'm feeling more inspired and creative than ever. It is indeed a shame the toll current events are taking on artists and musicians; so it would be very easy for me to feel guilty about this lock-down period bringing out the best in me - as it turns out, I just needed a break; as I tend to feel under pressure to be productive and creative all the time. However, as indicated, I feel I'm in a position now where I can look outwards and support other people who are struggling. Regrettably, my own issues caused me to lose sight of these things and become disconnected from the very people I needed to feel alive.

I'm looking forward to all of this subsiding in the hopefully-near future, and hope things will return brighter than ever for all of us.

Andrew Wright

Age 22

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

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

Cllr. Angela Doran
Cllr. Peter Heggie
Beverley Akinlami
Jock Kerr – Honorary President

Thanks to our sponsors...



West Lothian Youth Action Project

www.wlyap.org.uk

Email: office@wlyap.org.uk

Tel: 01506 431430