Hague, Nicola ORCID logoORCID:
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RESEARCH REPORT

Youth, community and social well-being: Investigating the role of youth groups in the health and social well-being of young people in semi-rural areas in the North of England.

Nicola Jane Hague; Spencer Swain; Helen Smith; and Rebecca Harland

OfS Uni Connect Programme

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Abstract

This research was conducted as a commissioned project by FutureHY, the York and North Yorkshire Uni Connect partnership. Formerly known as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), FutureHY strives to provide a variety of support to young people across York and North Yorkshire in terms of wellbeing, positive social identities, educational and career opportunities. Nationally, Uni Connect's focus is broad, working with schools, colleges and community groups to provide higher education opportunities predominantly for years 9 to 13 and to those in underrepresented areas. FutureHY has taken a hands-on approach from the start by getting to know the areas it serves and the communities within, in order to offer both core and bespoke outreach programmes for youth groups. This research adopted an evaluative approach of the youth groups in 4 semi-rural areas in the North of England. The aim of this was to examine how youth groups facilitate a collective sense of wellbeing, whilst providing opportunities for young people to engage in a variety of activities. This included a series of film workshops that were used to develop positive social identities for the young people and improve social cohesion within the wider community. This research was an important evaluative piece for FutureHY, as a Uni Connect partnership, to gain valuable feedback on the projects and youth groups operating within their area for further and future development.

Existing literature suggests a variety of contemporary issues are present in youth service provision in the UK. As such, a government policy entitled *'Positive for Youth'*, *A New Approach to Cross-government Policy for Young People Aged 13 to 19'* (HM Government 2011) which seeks to provide better education achievement opportunities and support for vulnerable individuals has been created to aid youth centres in being successful at improving young people's development. Studies examining anti-social behaviour and moral panic place young people at the centre of a cause and effect scenario, where any reports of trouble, damage or anti-social behaviour are immediately blamed on the young people of the local area. This common misconception of young people by wider

society in urban areas highlights the lack of literature on semi-rural areas and provides a rationale for this study. Rises in austerity in Britain have also been documented as problematic for the complex sector of youth provision, whilst little to no literature documenting the thoughts and reflections of the young people themselves outlines a lack of depth in youth service knowledge. With this in mind, this research sought to give voice to the marginalised young people in the 4 semi-rural areas with the view to aiding our knowledge on how and why young people use youth groups.

This research utilised a qualitative case study design where semi-structured interviews with young people and youth workers/ youth personnel were conducted. These interviews provided the opportunity to explore the reflections and opinions of those using and providing the front-line services in the 4 semi-rural areas. The interviews were then transcribed, and thematic analysis was conducted to allow for reoccurring patterns and themes of the data to be identified.

The key finding of this research was that in agreement with existing literature, a one size fits all approach in terms of the government's *'Positive for Youth', A New Approach to Cross-government Policy for Young People Aged 13 to 19'* policy is not sufficient nor fruitful for the young people in the North of England. The young people cited various reasons for attending their youth group which included socialising with friends, engaging in activities and managing their mental health. Significantly, the data highlighted that the differences between the formalities of school and the informalities of the youth group environments were key to the young people's level of enjoyment and engagement. This was particularly crucial in ward 3, a targeted youth group where the young people had experienced family estrangement and trouble with the law. The activities undertaken in each of the wards were enjoyed due to the autonomy the young people were given and the trusting social bonds that the young people formed with their youth workers, arguably increased the volume of social capital each young person was able to accumulate. The opportunities to engage in workshops and activities with the wider community were also positively received and demonstrate the positive relations that youth groups are able to achieve with wider society. Finally, despite the rise in austerity and funding cuts that influence how the youth groups are able to operate, there appears to be a positive relationship between lower levels of anti-social behaviour and moral panic between the young people and the wider community.

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that explores the issues, provision, development and outcomes of Youth Centres and/or clubs across the globe (Robertson 2001; Glover 2004; Smith et al. 2005; Sharpe et al. 2019). Robertson (2001, p.73) defines youth club service 'as the foundation of open, non-stigmatizing access from which specific project work with particular groups can develop'. This report will strive to investigate the role of youth centres in youth development whilst considering notions of anti-social behaviour, exclusion, social cohesion and accumulation and/ or lack of social and cultural capital that have long been associated with young people and youth centres. Research suggests that engagement in youth community groups can create positive benefits for young participants, such as improved self-efficacy, confidence and strengthening social development (Checkoway and Gutierrez 2006); however, more often than not according to Smith et al. (2005), young people are misunderstood, being described as delinquent, disengaged and different. A common ideology exists where often, predominantly white older members of the population hold the opinion that the youth of today are far different to the youth of years gone by and that living in a harmonious community is unlikely, therefore reducing social cohesion (Harris 2010). Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) argue that the youth of today are different due to advances in modernity and the way society works. They add that there are many positives to be gleamed from providing successful youth centres if young people are viewed as 'agents for change'. This study will seek to tease out nuances of semi-rural youth centres in the North of England.
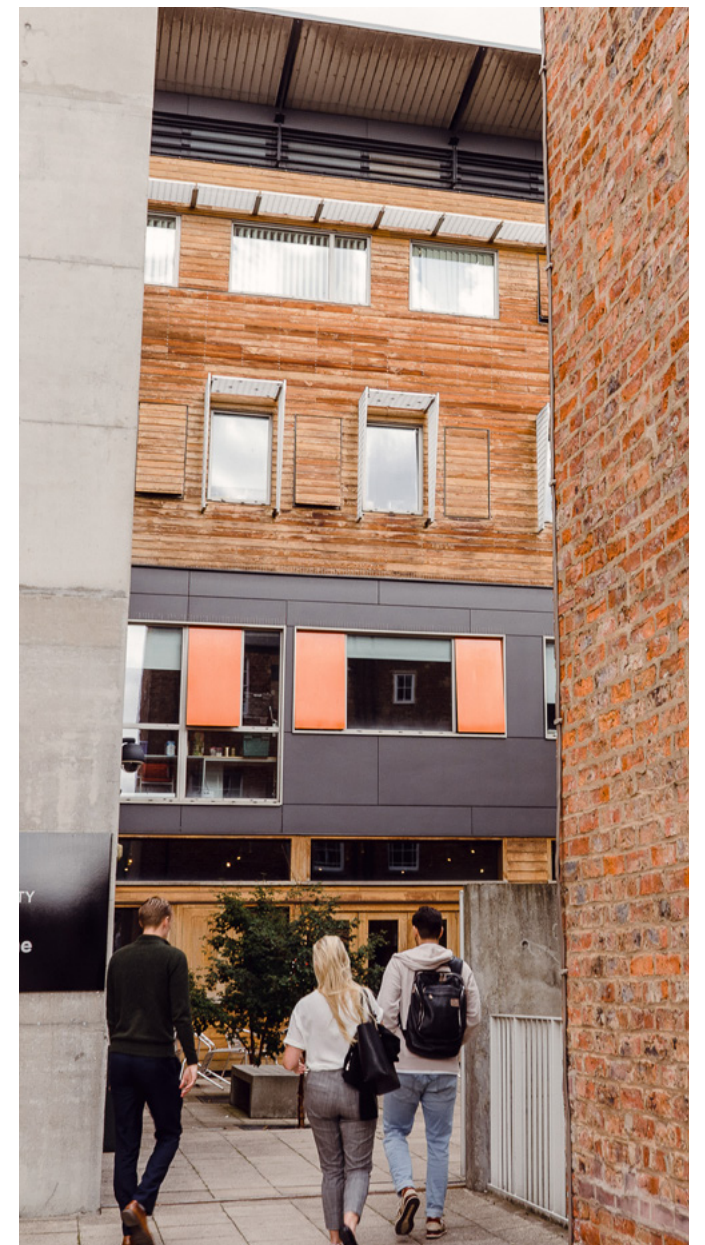
This introduction will explore the contemporary issues surrounding youth services by introducing moral panic and anti-social behaviour, political austerity and youth service provision. The aim of this is to firstly understand what the concept of moral panic is by exploring the perceptions of wider society on young people and how this links to social mobility and cohesion. In addition, there will be a discussion around anti-social behaviour and how prevalent this issue is before moving on to austerity in Britain and how this has affected youth service provision. Anti-social behaviour is a 'hot-topic' in relation to young people and is often linked to moral panic (Brown 1995; Cohen 2011). This study aims to understand the prevalence of these issues in the 4 wards (areas) that will be studied. Following this, there will be an outline of the key terms that will be used throughout this study and finally, the aims and research questions will be stated.

Contemporary Issue: Moral panic and anti-social behaviour, political austerity and youth provision cuts

A primary concern on the topic of youth is that of anti-social behaviour; a contemporary issue that appears no more solved or prevented than when the first pieces of literature on youth work were conducted in 1863 (Robertson 2001). Sensationalising media portrayals of youth provides consumers of news with a recurrent picture of a type of 'street-corner society' where young people take drugs, are disengaged from school and commit crimes (Checkoway and Gutierrez 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick 2007). The result of this continuum can be moral panic; a term that describes widespread societal fear over the potential upheaval of the values, safety and normality of a community or place (Harris 2010; Cohen 2011). Resulting in people within communities feeling threatened by gangs of young people who congregate in public spaces such as parks and town squares as there is an assumed understanding that these types of gatherings are ones of anti-social behaviour. Brown (1995) found during a study of youths in a city in North East England, that the local adults perceived a synonymous link between levels of crime and young people's behaviours/gatherings which adversely affected their quality of life. However, MacDonald and Shildrick (2007) argue that there are few studies undertaken examining the views and opinions on these topics from the young people themselves and that new research is required to understand youth more broadly if interventions such as youth centre provisions have any chance of being successful.

Another more recent development that Robinson, McLean and Densley (2019) assert is largely under researched, is the notion of 'County Lines'. Exacerbating the already prevalent issue of drug trafficking, dealing and using in the United Kingdom, county lines is a term used to describe the diversification of drug gangs out of major cities and across county boundaries into more rural areas to increase their profits (Robinson, McLean

and Densley 2019). According to the National Crime Agency (2016), 71% of police forces in Britain report county lines to be established in their constabulary. The perhaps somewhat alarming part of county lines is the exploitation and usage of children as young as 12 as runners for the drug products themselves, as drug lords have long been known to use those of lower socio-economic status to transport the drugs (May and Hough 2004). Arguably then, this could raise more questions on the effectiveness of youth clubs in the UK, whilst placing more emphasis on the importance of youth service provision as a whole. However, it cannot go unacknowledged that youth service provision is on a never-ending seesaw journey of provision, reduction, reestablishment, cutbacks and so forth. The economic crisis of 2007/2008 saw the rise of austerity in Britain and with it, the substantial financial cuts to education and youth services to name a few (Youdell and McGimpsey 2016).

In Cooper's (2012) article on the riots in Britain in 2011, he approaches his analysis through a different perspective, by offering the reader the alternate viewpoint that was not alluded to by reports at the time of the riots. With youth service provision cut in some areas by 75% and higher, Cooper (2012) argues that the closure of key youth centres that offered young people the chance to engage and be heard, were factors that led to some of the riots. Youth centres are commonly regarded as social safe places where young people can learn and develop their social and educational potential; Cooper (2012) states that the removal of these services was deemed catastrophic for young people during this time. According to Youdell and McGimpsey (2016), the problem partially lies in the fact that it is not the complete removal of funding to youth services by central government, rather, the flow of money into different localities and the decisions made by local government activity that influence how the smaller pots of money are to be used in their area thereby affecting youth service provision. Cooper (2012) asserts that a lack of youth service provision is to socially exclude a substantial number of the next generation of workers in Britain and that future research into the benefits of youth

centres should be carried out with the view to using the education techniques from youth workers in mainstream schooling. Thus, this complex range of issues presents a continuous circle of problems for local providers on how best to cater for the young people within their catchment area. This provides this study with a rationale for engaging in a case study approach to collect the views and experiences of the young people feeling the effects of these issues and needing the youth services.

Whilst the contemporary issue surrounding youth work focuses on anti-social behaviour and austerity, this project will also seek to explore several broader topics within the area, including focusing on youth centres more holistically; in particular, this project will explore semi-rural youth projects as traditional youth service provision research has focussed extensively on inner city areas (Farmer 2010; Nolas 2014). Findings from Nolas (2014) suggest that young people engage in urban youth centres to relieve boredom and escape their everyday activities which often concern problematic family / friend / school scenarios. The youth clubs provide a secure and safe place where they can be themselves for a short period of time and find a sense of connectedness. Furthermore, Nolas (2014) suggested that the youth club was an escape from possible drug involvement, police incidents and racism that were experienced on the streets of the local urban area. Data such as this from an urban area suggests the unconditional freedom to roam in and out of the club as the individuals pleased, giving them a sense of choice and belonging as and when they needed it (Nolas 2014). The issues prevalent to the young people within Nolas' (2014) work would suggest, according to Sullivan (2001), that they possess low levels of cultural capital and thus, low levels of educational aspiration. This study aims to understand if the same can be said for the individuals who participate in youth clubs in semi-rural areas in the North of England whilst gaining an understanding of the ebb and flow of capital within the groups.

Key Terms

Given the aims of this research, it is important to define a few key terms that will be used throughout this report. Firstly, the term youth, which is defined in terms of age group for policy and practice purposes as the ages of 13 to 25 (Wyn and White 1997). However, when considering the transition period from childhood to adolescence or youth, to adulthood, more recently, the lines have become blurred and people are remaining within one period for longer (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). This could be due to a variety of reasons such as improved technology that reaches children at younger ages, to remaining in education for longer and entering the field of work later (Wyn and White 1997). Moreover, it is important to understand this as some consideration as to who the youth services are aimed at should be given as the period of youth is non-linear and different for each individual (Lahlema and Gordon 2003).

Secondly, social capital which is a term more often associated with sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is 'a network of lasting relations, a belongingness or connectedness with others' (Hunter, Smith and Emerald 2015, p.13). Robert Putnam harbours a similar definition but adds trustworthiness and 'the norms of reciprocity' that are part of social networks that are created through the interweaving of activities that people build upon over time (Nicholson and Hoye 2008, p.5). In other words, as social networks are built upon and developed over time, so is the accrued amount of social capital held by an individual. However, these interactions with others to gain social capital must be meaningful if the social capital is to be exchanged for other types of capital, such as cultural and economic. Putnam (2000) suggests there are two concepts to social capital: bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital describes relations and connections between people who share similar interests, practices and behaviours and which are built on trust and reciprocity (Putnam 2000). An example would be young people of similar ages wishing to engage in recreational activities in a youth centre environment. By engaging with others, bonding capital can aid individuals to view others with a greater form of empathy and understanding, ultimately providing a sense of

connectedness. Bridging capital defines a network where individuals with less or no similar behaviours, interests and practices meet, and new connections are formed (Nicholson and Hoye 2008). High quality bridging capital is more difficult to create as by creating new networks with those outside of an existing network, exclusion and isolation of those within the immediate network can occur (Putnam 2008). However, bridging capital can create new connections and communications with others, thereby increasing opportunities for development. An example of this could be the youth group participants engaging in activities within colleges or universities and forming new links with new individuals that could aid them in the future. Social capital will be discussed in more detail in the literature review. Comparatively, according to Sullivan (2001, p.893) Bourdieu's cultural capital is the 'familiarity with the dominant culture in a society and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language'. This competence of culture is argued by Bourdieu (1984) to depend on an individual's social class and thus this can determine the level of success in education. This ideology will be considered throughout this report.

Thirdly, and according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DfEFRA 2013), areas with a population of less than 10,000 are considered to be rural. As such, this study will use the term 'semi-rural' given the 4 wards typography of being areas of towns, fringes and villages as opposed to urban areas that consist of major conurbation towns/cities in a non-sparse setting.

Finally, for key terms, social cohesion is a term used to describe an approach where communities desire the same outcomes and a sense of unitedness is apparent, as though the community is one, singular place with core values (Harris 2010). As a concept, social cohesion is difficult, yet not completely unachievable for young people, despite the pulls into global cultures that are radically available via increased technologies and access to other cities and areas (Harris 2010). This concept will also be utilised and discussed throughout.

Research questions and aims of the project

1. Evaluate the role of community centres in providing and delivering youth orientated sessions and activities in semi-rural towns in North of England.

2. Explore and critically evaluate the role of community centres as youth leisure spaces used to facilitate a collective sense of wellbeing.

3. Examine the role of community centres in semi-rural North of England towns as leisure spaces used by young people to develop positive social identities.

The aims of this project are to better understand the purpose of community centres as leisure spaces that help young people facilitate a sense of belonging within a semi-rural community, particularly where provision of existing services has been scaled back as a result of austerity measures imposed upon local provision by the Government (Youdell and McGimpsey 2016). Furthermore, by undertaking a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews being conducted with young people and community leaders within 4 semi-rural areas of the North of England, this project aims to seek out and understand how these young people construct their identities.

The structure of this report will be as follows: firstly, there will be a review of existing literature on moral panic and austerity in Britain whilst considering the function of youth centres more holistically, as well as detailed discussions on the forming and use of social capital as a tool for individual development. The literature review will finish with a discussion of education aspirations for young people in deprived or lower-level areas and what this is thought to mean for their possession of cultural capital. Throughout this literature review, Putnam's more specific concepts of bonding and bridging capital will be discussed as theories for how young people might rely on others to improve their quality of life, education achievements and other successes. Next, the report will turn to the methodology chapter which will outline the qualitative research design, methods and analysis undertaken for the project. Following this, the results and subsequent discussion of the 15 interviews with young people and community leaders will take place, applying Putnam's theoretical concepts as ways of

explaining the findings. The themes that will be discussed include the role of the youth groups and their importance; the participation benefits to the young people and the wider community; the substantial differences between the school and youth group environments; social wellbeing through behaviours and relationships in the youth group; the reliance of young people on their youth workers and anti-social behaviour and citizenship. Finally, the report will offer a conclusion of the key findings, whilst offering suggestions for interventions and future research opportunities that could arise from this study.

Literature Review

Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to outline existing knowledge in youth centre research that will include a discussion on austerity in Britain and the impact of this on youth service provision and the notion of moral panics in relation to young people's behaviours. Following this, there will be an outline of Putnam's notion of social capital and how this can be applied to understanding social cohesion, before the final section which will look at cultural capital development for young people and educational aspirations. It is hoped that this chapter will provide the reader with an overview of what is currently known and understood in youth provision, whilst outlining the aims and rationales for this study.

Youth centres, austerity and moral panics surrounding youth

According to Butler (2013) in an article in the Guardian, youth service provision was cut by 27% on average in the UK between 2010 and 2012. The recession of 2008 resulted in services for youth being provided by both private and public investment in the UK. Youdell and McGimpsey (2014) state that this recession has contributed towards changing agendas for youth service provision from 2010 to 2015 during the coalition government reign. This 'dismantling of the welfare state' (Youdell and McGimpsey 2014, p.116) within austerity Britain, has seen dramatic funding cuts to youth provision from central government whilst the expectations that the same or more services are provided are upheld. Furthermore, new policies such as 'Positive for Youth', A New Approach to Cross-government Policy for Young People Aged 13 to 19' has seen the sole focus of youth clubs/centres shift from that of an informal place that provided fun and educational sessions to more formal education sessions, designed to target those young people at risk of isolation, vulnerability and crime (Bradford and Cullen 2014). It seems, that to justify the allocation of funding to youth service provision, the government required a set of desired outcomes to be achieved through the operation of youth clubs. For example, in the policy document 'Positive for Youth', bold statements discerning away from negative analysis of youths is their number one focus, with better provision for education achievement and support for those with family problems high on the agenda (HM Government 2011). This is despite specific youth centre research (Glover 2004; Pope 2016; Sharpe et al. 2019) where interviews with young people have determined that they utilise the youth centres for more reasons other than education.

In Sharpe et al's. (2019) study, based in Canada, 40 semi-structured interviews with young people revealed that most of the participants enjoyed their involvement with the youth groups as it provided them with the opportunity to be themselves, arguably allowing their identity to evolve, whilst being removed from the strict authoritarian environment of school. Likewise, in Coburn's (2011) study, young people suggested that being a part of a different environment from that of school was important to them, with participants in Nolas (2014) study describing their youth club as their safety centre that lessened the chances of them becoming involved in drugs and/or with the police. Given this research and more besides it, the government's policy to give voice to young people and provide them with educational opportunities appears to be written as a cause and effect scenario. In other words, that the youth of today are problems to be addressed in a bid to solve wider societal problems such as moral panic, which are often linked or regarded as a result of the behaviours of the young people (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Bradford and Cullen 2014).

As briefly discussed in the introduction, the concept of moral panics can be used to describe a sense of unsettlement between two groups of people, for example, residents of a town and young people who congregate in large numbers in public places (Farmer 2010; Cohen 2011). The possibility of threats to peace and moral civilisation, lead to perpetuated fears that the outsider group, or in this example, the youth group, are troublemakers and this lends itself to the term moral panic (Brown 1995; Cohen 2011; Pickering, Kintrea and Bannister 2011). The result of a moral panic is often sensationalism by the media who are able to present their stories often with exaggerated flare in the hope that it creates a reaction by being the advocate of the voices of the local people, who need the problem resolving (Checkoway and Guiterrez 2006; Cohen 2011). This media portrayal according to Hall (1978) and Checkoway and Guiterrez (2006), results

in young people being perceived as school failures, drug users and criminals. Hall's (1978) key work on the rise and prevalence of muggings in the 1970's (amongst other topics), extensively details how the media were used by powerful politicians to portray the mentality of 'winning' the war against muggings, arguably creating social exclusion between different classes of people. Perhaps interestingly, Hall's (1978) statistical analysis of crime rates in 1972 suggest that there was not a sudden surge in the amount of crimes; the perpetuation of the reporting of the crimes by the media was the reason for the illusion of higher crime rates. Arguably then, this could be still prevalent today, where young people are seen in a public place and due to easily accessible media outlets, they are perceived as causing problems and therefore are labelled as problems that need intervention.

In a study of a council estate in Teesside in the North East of England, MacDonald and Shildrick (2007) interviewed 40 stakeholders who worked alongside youths and 88 participants in youth clubs and family centres with young people aged between 15 and 25. In one interview with a young male, he described the youth club as somewhere that is only socially acceptable to visit if you are younger than 17:

> 'you can't go into a youth club at 17! Cos they're all young 'uns aren't they? All there is is... it's a lack of everything. There's nothing to do, just streets to walk down and stuff like that' (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007, p.343).

However, the authors argue that having 'nothing to do' was not the sole reason that these young people did not attend the youth club. Socialising with others of similar ages on the streets lent itself to a form of psychological and social stimulus that was desired by the young people. When asked about their time spent on the streets, the interviewees were very quick to defend their behaviours and stress the incorrect labelling by others (mainly the police) as to their intentions (MacDonald and Shildrick

2007). To separate themselves from home, school and family constraints, the importance of the relations they formed with others on the streets strengthened as the years progressed and in some interview cases, came full circle. When asked what the young people do on an evening, one male replied: 'drink, cause havoc, fight' (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007, p.344). Financial constraints were described as justification for a permanent state of limbo for these young people who were unable to engage in any activities that required expenditure. Their lack of engagement in education propelled these young people into hanging around in gangs of young people in the same predicament as a way of passing time. Once again, it appears that the circle of moral panic remains an ideology that is continually constructed and reconstructed by the perpetuation of social relations that influence these young people's identity and evolving habitus (Bourdieu 1984; MacDonald and Shildrick 2007).

The topic of money and austerity appears to go hand in hand in youth studies research (McLaughlin 2000; Bradford and Cullen 2014; Pope 2016; Youdell and McGimpsey 2016). For example, in 2008, Bradford and Cullen (2014) report there were a little over 3000 professionally qualified youth workers. In 2011/2012, Cooper (2012) states the loss of 3000 youth work jobs. More recently, reporting by the Guardian (2020) on a study by the charity YMCA found cuts of 70% in youth services in the last decade, equating to the closure of 750 youth centres and over 4,500 youth workers. In semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 5 youth workers in the North West of England, Pope (2016) found that austerity and youth provision cuts were a prominent discourse and theme of the data. One focus group conversation highlighted the moral dilemma youth workers face when austerity arrives on their doorstep and cuts are to be made. The youth workers state that they if they are to be of use to young people, they need to deliver high quality sessions that the young people themselves desire and will benefit from. This is due to the fact that the young

people and their relations with their youth workers is built on trust and the youth worker can use this trust to aid the young people more holistically in various areas of their lives. However, the youth workers feel constricted to provide services that comply with policy requirements to 'help' the young people become successful (Pope 2016). Nolas (2014) argues that not every youth club should be treated in the same way and a one-size-fits-all approach in terms of content delivery in the sessions is neither useful nor productive for the young people. Based on their continually evolving habitus and identity that is perpetuated by the liaisons they form and maintain with others in the area, youth workers establish a 'shop-floor' understanding of these young people and are, more often than not, in a position to try and achieve the best from these young people (Coburn 2011). Thus, this study aims to understand if and how youth centres in semi-rural areas can construct and develop social identities through the use of their youth space and the relations they form with the youth workers.

Social Capital and Social Cohesion

In his work, 'Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community' Putnam (2000) asserts that life can be made considerably easier if there is an accumulation of social capital within a society, in that individuals are able to gain and maintain social capital and use it as an exchangeable asset that can provide other forms of capital. For example, the well-known phrase 'it's not what you know but who you know', is an ideology of Putnam's where he suggests that securing a job can often be accredited to the amount of social capital one has (who you know) as opposed to your educational capital (what you know) (Putnam 2000). The theoretical use of social capital as a framework for sociologists and policy makers has become increasingly popular over recent years, however, Leonard (2004) suggests an air of caution when using social capital theory to determine new policies due to its complex nature.

For Leonard (2004) who is critical of Putnam's definitions and application of social capital, particularly his apparent simplistic use of bonding and bridging capital, Putnam does not wholly consider the possibility and probability that enhancing bonding and bridging capital can have negative effects on those it seeks to aid. However, her article focuses predominantly on the area of West Belfast in the wake of political turbulence and focuses on an estate that has ostracised itself from the government in a bid to take care of itself (Leonard 2004). Leonard (2004) finds, that despite being recognised at the time of research as the poorest area in Belfast, West Belfast actually created, maintained, managed and utilised a rich percentage of social capital. Thus, contradicting Putnam's (2000) theory that those in economic turmoil are likely to not accumulate social capital despite it being the best chance of improving their economic state. It could be said therefore, that Leonard's (2004) focus is distinctly narrow and her judgements regarding Putnam's depth of theory are possibly only relevant in the scenario she presents. The relevance of social capital in youth studies is arguably important, given youth centres' aims of increasing relationships and building

networks amongst and through young people (Coburn 2011). This study and its focus on young people and their role in the community and wider society has the potential to test Putnam's application of social capital as a method for understanding youth more broadly, thereby adding to the existing literature on youth work and indeed, social capital.

In a three-year ethnographic study at a purpose-built facility in Scotland, Coburn (2011) conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with young people who regularly attended their youth group. In discussions on an international cultural exchange, the young people spoke of their understandings and perceptions of other young people from different backgrounds as significantly increased during group work where the youth worker challenged the groups to discuss cultural diversity and what it meant for each of them. By mixing the individuals who did not know one another in a group together and through the youth worker's facilitation, the young people were forced to enter discussions regarding their own perceptions and barriers (Coburn 2011). Coburn (2011) argues that due to the length of the youth exchange and therefore the enhancement of the resources the young people were able to navigate and earn, the young people gained social and cultural capital. By learning of the cultural diversity of others, the young people were able to challenge their own ideologies of others, thus evolving their own constructed understanding of the lives of others. In turn, this allowed the young people to consider their own race, ethnicity and gender in their own evolving identity (Robertson 2001; Coburn 2011). This study rigorously tests both bonding and bridging capital through the views and reflections of young people's involvement in a youth setting. Coburn (2011) suggests that the young people's participation not only enhanced their bonding capital with others in the same position as them but facilitated enhanced bridging capital through interactions with others and the youth workers. In agreement with Putnam (2000), Coburn (2011) states that time attendance at such centres is insignificant to warrant any form of change; it is the continued facilitated informal learning that perpetuates the young people's understanding and knowledge. For many,

their own recognition of their learning and understanding made them desire to continue to increase their level of social capital and involvement with the centre. By doing this, the young people recognised the changes in their own circumstances as many suggested previous identities where their time was spent on the street -as was found in Nolas (2014).

In summary, youth centres appear to have the tools to provide young people with the opportunity to accumulate capital whilst evolving their sense of identity which ultimately can aid their sense of social cohesion within the community. This study will therefore seek to gain an understanding of how prevalent the activities engaged in within the 4 semi-rural wards in the North of England are in constructing identities and enabling participants to reap social capital.

Cultural Capital and educational aspiration

Coburn's (2011) study demonstrates how youth centres can not only evoke enhanced social capital, but also cultural capital by expanding the young people's understanding of diversity and inclusion within wider society. In a quantitative study of year 11 cohorts in 5 schools in Britain, Sullivan (2001) found that the level of cultural capital possessed by parents had a significant influence on the educational attainment of the young people. Sullivan (2001) asked the students to complete a questionnaire on their family life, including their parent's education qualifications, employment and leisure time that could contribute towards their level of cultural capital. Sullivan (2001) tested variables such as reading, language and knowledge levels in the pupils and found that formal cultural activities such as attending the theatre and museums had no more significance on the level of cultural capital the students had, compared with informal activities such as watching television. If the television programmes consumed were of higher cultural meaning such as documentaries, political programmes and literary adaptations, this translated into higher educational attainment and use of language by the pupils. Given these findings, this study aims to tease out how prudent the level of informal educational activities is within the youth groups to be studied, whilst asking the young people on their education aspirations.

Comparatively, the aim of Glover's (2004) Canadian study was to evaluate how participation in a youth centre influenced the individual's perceptions of citizenship. Although citizenship is noted to be a difficult term to define due to its connections to political, civil and social ties, Glover (2004, p.66) states that it is 'simple membership in a nation-state' that considers the aforementioned ties and that the practice of citizenship is to engage in beneficial behaviours that will improve social connections, intelligence and self-efficacy. By actively engaging in the process of citizenship, Glover (2004) alludes to the enhancement of social capital and thus social cohesion and mobility. In his study, Glover (2004) interviewed 7 adults who either engaged in the community centre's programmes, volunteered in the activities and who lived in the area. His

findings, which are similar to those discussed by Lister et al. (2003), suggest there are three types of citizen involved in the centre: the participatory citizen, the responsible citizen and the communal citizen. The participatory citizen gave the opportunity for voices to be heard, opinions to be noted and activities to be planned as a result. These participants discussed how the involvement of the local community in terms of deciding what activities were to be programmed brought with it an increased sense of social cohesion and individual self-confidence.

 However, simply stating what the young people wanted to happen was not sufficient, and thus, Glover (2004) found that being a responsible citizen was also significant. This meant although individuals have rights to comment on suggested activities and aspirations of what they would like to happen at the centre, there came with this an expected responsibility to engage in such activities. Thus, the participants suggested that to be a citizen you need a sense of the 'bigger picture' in terms of responsibility to act on desires. Finally, the communal citizen encompassed a sense of belonging to the community that was founded on the social networks and interdependencies formed between individuals at the centre (Glover 2004). Despite the community centre being classed as within a high-risk area, Glover (2004) concludes that community centres can foster an increased sense of citizenship through reciprocal acts and trust. However, this study did not explicitly discuss the types of activities engaged in and whether certain activities foster a more enhanced sense of social mobility in relation to citizenship than others. Therefore, without knowing the finer details of what programmes the centre conducts, an analysis of the effectiveness of the engagement of the young people is perhaps diluted. This is arguably then, an angle through which social capital can be enhanced and as such, an area that will be explored further within the interviews to understand the young people's knowledge of citizenship and its importance in their lives in 4 semi-rural settings in the UK.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored a variety of contemporary issues in relation to youth service provision in the UK. Whilst anti-social behaviour and youth service cuts are well documented in the literature, there appears to be a common misconception of how young people are understood and perceived by wider society (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007). What is also well-documented is the apparent importance of youth centres as a safe place for young people to develop their personal and social skills (Coburn 2011; Nolas 2014). However, the rise of austerity in Britain has placed youth service in dire straits in terms of availability and accessibility for young people across the country (Pope 2016). Despite the existing literature highlighting these issues, what is lacking is discussions with the young people themselves, particularly in semi-rural areas in Britain, as statistics alone are not sufficient to assess the problems facing youth provision and the level to which these services are needed by young people (Putnam 2000; Glover 2004). This provides a rationale for this study and therefore the methods used will now be discussed in the next chapter.

Methods Chapter

Introduction

The following chapter will outline the research design, methods of data collection, ethical approval and data analysis for the project. Firstly, the chapter will explore the researchers underpinning research standpoint, before discussing the reasons for adopting a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews as the data collection process. This will include the potential challenges of this method and how the researcher overcame them. Next, the finer nuances of how the interviews were arranged and conducted will be outlined. The following section will discuss how the project gained ethical approval and include how consent was gained for the young people to participate. Finally, the chapter will turn to data analysis. Here, the six stages of thematic analysis will be highlighted by providing the reader with a detailed outline of how the findings were coded and reworked into the key themes of the project.

Epistemological position

Given the three research questions/ statements and during the planning for the project, it was decided that a collective case study approach would provide the opportunity to evaluate and analyse the 4 different youth centres/ groups in 4 different semi-rural areas within the North of England (Sparkes and Smith 2018). Furthermore, the collective case study approach would be undertaken from an interpretivist perspective as this provided the researcher with the opportunity to engage in the gathering of opinions and experiences of marginalised groups. The underpinning notion of qualitative research acknowledges that there are different forms of knowledge available and thus, interpreting the individuals studied through semi-structured interviews would hopefully seek to fill any gaps in knowledge on youth centres in these areas (Smith 2010; Atkinson 2012; Bryman 2016). A central aim of this study was to provide opportunities for the young people within these areas with the chance to voice their thoughts in line with the ideology of social justice.

Method of data collection

As previously stated, semi-structured interviews were determined to be the most appropriate method as not only are they considered the gold standard method of qualitative research, but they allow the researcher to question participants with relevant topics and themes whilst the participant themselves can convey their thoughts freely in a rich and detailed manner (Kvale and Brinkman 2009; Neuman 2014; Sparkes and Smith 2018). Furthermore, youth studies such as those by MacDonald and Shildrick (2007), Coburn (2011), Pope (2016) and Sharpe et al. (2019) discussed in the literature review also used semi-structured interviews and commented on their effectiveness for teasing out rich data, thereby enhancing the opportunity to provide a voice for the voiceless. However, it should be noted that despite the clear advantages to the semi-structured interviews, this method is not without its challenges. By liaising with a member of the commissioners' outreach staff, the researcher was able to attend staff meetings to be introduced to the community leaders in each of the four wards. As each of these leaders were to be interviewed, this introductory meeting enabled the researcher to instigate the building of rapport by discussing her own background and asking enquiring questions regarding the leader's role and responsibilities.

Matthews (2010) states that the building of rapport is crucial between an interviewer and an interviewee; however, in this type of environment, an element of trust was also required between the young people and the researcher that the information discussed in the interviews would not jeopardise their position within the club (Nesti et al. 2012). To navigate this challenge, the researcher attended the youth club sessions where the young people were in an environment that they were comfortable with and spoke to the group in a calm, informal manner explaining the

project. This method was both helpful in the sense that the participants were familiar with their settings and therefore more relaxed in the interview room itself; however, this was also particularly difficult at times, as the youth group session at Ward 2 was in the next room and maintaining participant concentration levels was challenging. This was mitigated as much as possible by asking the participants to reengage with the interview and asking the question again to refocus the conversation. The participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the project regarding their participation and assured that pseudonyms would be given to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Bryman 2016). Additionally, semi-structured interviews can be difficult in terms of listening to answers whilst considering the next question and attempting to continually ask open-ended questions to give the participants the opportunity to discuss their thoughts (Atkinson 2012). On occasions, this proved challenging as some young people appeared initially less confident or willing to engage in the process; however, to mitigate against this wherever possible, the researcher used the nature of the semi-structured interviews to move from one topic to the next as a form of involvement and detachment, if it was noted that the participant appeared to want to elaborate on that theme (van Kriken 1998; Armour and Griffiths 2012). Sociologists are often caught up in and by their research and thus to avoid leading questions, the researcher regularly attempted to rephrase questions to change the style of closed to open questions (van Kriken 1998). Alternatively, and given that semi-structured interviews offer the option to be less structured and more open to adaptation, the researcher asked questions in different orders according to how the participants were engaging with the interview, therefore, each interview flowed in a different way. This was one technique that appeared successful throughout the project.

Data collection

During the planning stages for the project, the researcher was given 4 semi-rural areas within the North of England to study the youth centres and their programmes by the commissioners of the project. An outreach worker assigned to wards 1 and 2 and another assigned to wards 3 and 4 were made available to the researcher to gain access to the youth centre leaders and the young people. From here, the introductory meetings were arranged and during these, the participant consent forms, and gatekeeper consent forms were discussed, as well as the timetabling of the interviews. It was determined that due to the researcher's dependence on the outreach worker to provide access, that non-random, convenience sampling was necessary (Sparkes and Smith 2018). Given the time constraints of the project, combined with travel distance and timetabled youth group sessions, this form of sampling was deemed most appropriate to access the participants (Walliman 2011; Thomas, Nelson and Silverman 2015). Through this convenience sampling, the criteria for the study could also be achieved and thus purposive sampling was also used. The desires of the project's commissioners were for participants to be of both genders, aged 12+ and having participated in the youth group for at least one year.

At the times arranged between the youth group leaders and the researcher, face-to-face, one-to-one interviews were conducted in a mostly quiet, segregated room in the youth centre buildings in each of the four wards. The original plan was to conduct 16 interviews in total. 3 interviews with the young people in each ward and 1 interview with the youth leader. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, ward 4's youth group did not become fully functional in time for this research to conclude. Therefore, no young people were interviewed at this ward. Rather, the youth leader and additional overseeing outreach personnel of the organisation were interviewed and thus, the interviews were scheduled as such:

Ward 1- 3 young people; 1 youth leader

Ward 2- 4 young people; 1 youth leader (who left the role during the research project)

Ward 3- 4 young people; 1 youth leader

Ward 4- 1 youth leader

1 FutureHY (Uni Connect) personnel overseeing all areas

At Ward 3's timetabled interview sessions, one young person declined to participate in the study and thus, 3 young people and 1 youth leader were interviewed here, bringing the total number of participants to 15. The start of each interview involved a reminder of the aims of the research project and an explanation of the information sheet and consent form. Each participant was then asked to sign the consent form and reminded that their data would remain confidential. Whilst the Dictaphone was being set up to record the interview, they were assured that the audio would remain on a password-protected university OneDrive account that only the researcher and lead researcher would have access to. The recordings were used to allow for data analysis later and thus the interviews began. The topics broadly covered: themselves and youth centre participation; the community centre itself, the centre as a form of community and their education. Given the complex nature and possible backgrounds for each of the young people, the researcher remained prepared throughout each interview, should the need to terminate the interview due to any potential distress arise (Ennis and Chen 2012). The interviews lasted between 7 minutes and 47 minutes. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they had anything to add and were thanked for their participation. De-brief information sheets were handed out with the details of the charity 'Mind' to offer advice should any of the participants require it.

Ethical considerations

Given the nature of the participants to be studied, a main focus and priority of the ethics proposal was the use of a gatekeeper to supply consent for the young people to participate. Having discussed with the commissioners the logistics of getting parental consent for the project, it was determined that as the young people do not always attend regularly and consistently to every weekly session, that the youth leader could take the role of gatekeeper to authorise the young people's participation. This also ensured that the participants of the study were not pre-chosen, as this was determined by who turned up and engaged in the project on the timetabled day of the interviews, which ultimately ensured the methodology remained integral. The ethics proposal was submitted to the York St John University Ethics Committee and granted ethical approval in January 2020. As previously stated, the participants were strongly reminded that their participation in the project was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study without prejudice up to a month post interview. The participants were also reminded that their information would be stored securely for a minimum of six months on a password-protected university OneDrive account and that themselves and any others or organisations or places mentioned would be allocated a pseudonym (Neuman 2014). Finally, as in line with the ethics of this study, it was imperative that all interviews take place at the youth centre where the gatekeepers were present for the duration of the interviews. The researcher also engaged with the gatekeepers pre and post interview to discuss the interview questions and the de-brief sheet which was designed to offer support to anyone who needed it regarding any issues that were discussed. No participant or gatekeeper raised any concerns before, during or after the interviews.

Data analysis and rigour

In this qualitative study, six-stage thematic analysis on NVivo 12 was used. This method is particularly effective for managing large amounts of data which was the case in this project (Braun and Clarke 2006; Bryman 2016). NVivo 12 allows the manageability of working with patterns and themes and proved useful for the vast number of transcript pages taken from the 15 interviews. It is also a method by which to provide trustworthiness in qualitative research, particularly transferability, as the availability of the data in the programme can offer any reader the opportunity to draw their own conclusions (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Jackson and Bazeley 2019). After each interview was completed, the interviews were transcribed verbatim during stage one of thematic analysis: Immersion. Each recording was listened to several times whilst notes were made on reoccurring words, themes or patterns which were based on the literature reviewed for this project (Sparkes and Smith 2018; Sharpe et al. 2019).

During stage 2 and 3, first order codes or themes were given to the data that was similar in nature (Braun and Clarke 2006). Coding of large amounts of data is said to provide the researcher the opportunity to continually work the data and rigorously analyse it for themes and patterns (Jackson and Bazeley 2019). In total, 44 codes were created and reworked. For stage 4, these codes were reworked into hierarchies that allowed the researcher to clarify thoughts and meanings of each code. For stage 5, names were then given to each code. The following overarching codes were formed and included: 'Anti-social behaviour'; 'effects of austerity'; 'behaviours and relationships within youth groups'; 'youth group operation'; 'citizens'; 'importance of youth groups'; 'increasing participation and future plans'; 'participation benefits'; 'school vs youth group differences'; 'social wellbeing'; 'the wider community'; 'education and skills'; 'young people's reliance on youth workers'. These themes were identified through the answers given by the participants to the interview questions where particular phrases or patterns were prevalent (Braun and Clarke 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate that a level

of researcher judgement is necessary to determine the importance of each theme, therefore, it was decided that due to the time limit restrictions of this project that 9 overarching themes would be discussed in stage 6, as these contained the best available data to answer the research questions. Thus, stage 6 was completed and this involved the presentation and discussion of the findings as will be outlined in the next chapter. This stage was only completed post-discussion with the lead researcher on the project as this gave the project credibility as findings were discussed to ensure rigour and that their meanings were correctly analysed through the presentation of extracts of the data (Guest, Namey and MacQueen 2012; Jackson and Bazeley 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to offer the reader an insight into the methodology chosen for this project by detailing and justifying each step of the process. A qualitative case study approach from an interpretivist perspective was deemed the most appropriate approach to take. Purposive, convenience sampling was also the most appropriate method to use, due to the researcher's reliance on the outreach workers to provide access to the youth groups. 15 semi-structured interviews with a variety of individuals in various roles in the youth centres were completed and 9 overarching themes were identified through thematic analysis using NVivo 12 as prevalent to answering the research questions. These themes consisted of the role of youth centres; reflections on activities; reliance of young people on youth workers; the effects of austerity; social wellbeing; participation benefits; the importance of youth groups; anti-social behaviour and citizenship. These themes will form the subheadings of the following results and discussion chapter, which will present the data and evaluate the findings in relation to Putnam's theoretical framework.

Results and Discussion Chapter

Introduction

This chapter will explore the data from the interviews that have been analysed into prevalent themes to answer the research questions. The chapter will be formatted in three sub-sections with the aim of discussing each research question in order. Firstly, the chapter will evaluate the success of the provision of the youth groups in the 4 semi-rural areas in the North of England and will include a discussion of a film workshop that was completed by 3 of the 4 wards. The second section will evaluate the participation benefits the young people gain from these youth groups that suggests there is an improved sense of social wellbeing. It will be argued that the well highlighted difference between school and youth group environments is of significant importance that allows these young people to develop their social capital. Finally, the third section will evaluate the importance of the youth groups by discussing subtopics such as anti-social behaviour and citizenship and the way the behaviours and relationships produced in these youth groups both enables and constrains these young people into fostering a sense of positive social identity.

The Role of Youth Centres

As an introduction to the interviews, each participant was asked to describe their involvement in their local youth group, why they were involved, what they did prior to joining the group and some of the activities they have participated in. The main reason cited for their involvement in the youth group was the social aspect of their friends being there; however, the options to engage in activities, help their mental health and help the community were also reasons given. Furthermore, all cited that the youth groups offer a chance to get off the streets which was how they spent their free time prior to joining the groups:

> P3: you could go there and have fun with your friends and stop us getting in trouble messing about on the streets.

> P10: to help, basically help the community and it gives people like me and everyone else, an opportunity to have our words said and just somewhere to go, like, other than staying out in the streets and staying at home and being bored, it's like somewhere to go.

In agreement with findings from Sharpe et al. (2019), these young people placed high value on the opportunity to go to the youth group environment to spend time with their friends in a more informal setting than structured schooling. This was also highlighted as incredibly important by the adults running or involved with the sessions. Participant 13 suggested that school is often built on a 1-30 teacher-pupil ratio, where the emphasis is on academic goals and examinations:

> P13: at school, it's one to thirty young people, they don't get the sort of small group work, where they can actually ask the questions and sit round… and you'll be doing a particular activity and at the end of the session, you end up talking about drugs… or sexual health.

Participant 14 also said, 'if they're struggling at school, they can let off some steam', whilst participant 15, who was responsible for aiding with creating the young people's film that will be discussed shortly, said:

> P15: If they were behaving the way they behaved in school setting, they'd be suspensions and detentions and all sorts going on and there probably wouldn't be many people left in the room, but you can't do community projects like that, cos you exclude the ones that really need the help.

It is important to note here that participant 15 was not suggesting that behaviour in youth groups is negative, rather they highlighted the difference in how the young people interact with one another according to the environment they are in. This was particularly prevalent in Ward 3, which was a targeted youth group, where the individuals were signposted to the group due to their previous experiences of being in trouble in the local community. The youth worker of this group suggested that the young people in this group display extremely strong social bonds between one another:

> P9: the whole group are extremely close. I would say almost like siblings because when they argue and fall out, half of them fight and fall out and next minute they're all best friends again. It's just like a sibling relationship that they are extremely close, they all look out for each other and if you upset one, you've upset them all. And they will stick up and fight tooth and nail for each other. Even when they know that what they've done is wrong.

According to Putnam, individuals in disadvantaged communities may have less opportunity to utilise the strength of these social bonds between one another and exchange this to social capital (Hoye and Nicholson 2008). This may particularly be the case when young people are involved in only one activity and as such, Putnam argues that engagement in a variety of activities can aid the creation of social capital, which ultimately can make life easier (Putnam 2000). The levels of reciprocity and trust within these youth groups were highlighted by all participants, which arguably demonstrates the potential of these youth groups to create bonding capital.

These bonds appeared to be distinctly important when the researcher asked about the relations amongst the young people in the groups whilst comparing them to the school environment. Participant 10 said, 'school is massively…you have like anxiety and [are] paranoid what everyone thinks of you and the pressure this [youth group] takes off'…, whilst participant 6 said,

> it's [activities] better doing it here where you're in a smaller group than if you're at school because you can actually focus, and we can talk about it openly and stuff. At school, sometimes you feel like you can't talk to anyone because they'll judge you.

Once again, these findings align with Glover (2004), Pope (2016) and Sharpe et al. (2019) who argued that the role of a youth group is far more than a place for education achievement. This perhaps suggests that new policies such as 'Positive for Youth': A New Approach to Cross-government Policy for Young People aged 13 to 19' whilst offering substantial guidance on improving prospects for young people, are failing to take into account semi-rural settings such as those in this study that do not fall into a 'one, single plan' intervention as stated in this policy. That said, when considering Nolas' (2014) urban study on youth groups, the same distinction between school and youth groups were made, suggesting that the views of young people in rural and urban areas are the same on this topic. The youth groups in this study show three different demographics of young people, where a 'one size fits all' approach is neither accurate nor fruitful in terms of the support and services that they need. However, despite their differences, each ward engaged in a relatively similar range of activities and the participants were asked for their reflections and opinions on these as part of the evaluation of the success of these semi-rural groups.

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Reflections on activities

All interviewees discussed a range of activities that were readily undertaken and enjoyed, and these included a film workshop made by the young people, arts and crafts, sports, cooking, DJ course, educational and recreational outdoor visits, working in the community (gardening, soup kitchens), mindfulness sessions and informative workshops (County Lines) to name but a few. Of the 11 young people interviewed, all activities were acknowledged as enjoyable and useful, with only 3 young people naming a few activities that were not enjoyed. The reasons stated for these were personal preferences, such as participant 8, who said 'I don't like rounders, I prefer dodgeball'. The same questions were also put to the youth workers. Participant 13 acknowledged that once again, a one size fits all approach is not effective when he discussed how young people from semi-rural areas receive activities in comparison to young people from urban areas:

> P13: I love the smaller groups, the villager groups, because they're just enthusiastic. They absolutely love doing the activities. Some of the bigger towns, they just want to sit there on their mobile phones.

Although it is not in the scope of this project to explicitly discuss the demographics of where the young people live in relation to their participation and enjoyment levels, there is little research available on youth groups in semi-rural/ rural settings per se (Farmer 2010). This study found that the young people within these semi-rural areas were very open to new activities and enjoyed the range provided for them as they were given the autonomy to choose what they engaged in at each session. For example, at ward 2, participant 6 said that the activities gave them the chance to engage in opportunities that were not available in the family environment, such as attending the photography workshop:

> P6: young people have more opportunities and before I came here, I wouldn't be able to go [name of place] and other places that we've been, because, I can't, we can't afford it.

The broad range of activities arguably provides the young people with the opportunities to develop their cultural capital which without the group they would not have the means by which to do so. Additionally, at ward 2, the researcher observed a whiteboard that listed the 4 activities of the evening's session, which were: rounders, connect 4, Wii- Just Dance and chill out zone. Participant 8 said that the previous week they had engaged in mask making which was 'good for the mind' as they got the chance to chat in an informal setting. This could be said to be aiding the young people's collective sense of wellbeing as per findings from Coburn (2011) who suggested that activities such as this create the opportunity for discussions on a variety of topics without the restrictions enforced either at home or at school.

According to Coburn (2011), tasks where young people are invited to engage with others, discuss their opinions and engage creatively in a task offer the chance for young people to gain social and cultural capital. One such activity that was determined to be particularly beneficial by both the young people and the youth workers, was the creation of a film about the young people and their local area. The film was created with a local organisation, who encouraged the young people to create the topics they wanted to discuss. All participants suggested that they wished to tackle the stigmatisms attached to young people by wider society in terms of reputations, behaviours and appearances as has been highlighted by Nolas (2014). Participant 15 said the film was:

> Engineered around what the young people want to say… what young people feel like, we want to know what dreams and aspirations young people have, or what barriers and challenges they're facing.

Participant 15 added that the screening of the film to the local area, including those in influential positions of power was extremely positive for the young people and gave them a sense of pride and achievement:

Out of that screening, some of the people were then invited to go and speak to the local council, so then you've gone from this very polarised situation where it's them and us mentality and young people don't really care and the 'police are at us all the time' to let's have a conversation with our local people… they can be change makers.

Half of the young people interviewed were involved in the film and each one spoke positively about the experience, with participant 10 saying 'the film was a really good example of having our word out there, saying not all of us have got bad things', and participant 2 said 'I'd say the film helped me build more confidence'. This activity offered these young people of the three different semi-rural areas, the opportunity to create something from scratch, present their ideas to the wider community and make plans involving them for the future. It could be argued then, that this activity provided these young people with the potential to engage in bridging capital with other people outside of their normal network, ultimately enhancing their volume of social and cultural capital. This demonstrates how youth groups can positively work towards communities all desiring the same outcomes, in other words, social cohesion (Harris 2010). Increased self-confidence to speak out in front of others was highlighted by all involved and visually witnessing the impact their work had on powerful organisations such as the local authority was something that the young people did not initially credit themselves capable of achieving. Putnam states that 'communication, cooperation and positive collection action' are central to what communities can achieve (Hoye and Nicholson 2008, p.5). This film provided the link between the young people and powerful others that has ultimately given each of the 3 wards the opportunity to improve their social capital and therefore life, by enforcing a sense of collective wellbeing and social cohesion between multiple parties. This chapter will now turn towards how the youth groups facilitate social wellbeing by discussing the benefits of participating in these groups and the role of the youth workers in these networks.

Social Wellbeing and Participation Benefits

To gauge the effectiveness of the youth groups in the semi-rural areas of the North of England, all participants were asked to reflect on the perceived benefits of participating in the youth groups. The aim of these questions was to build an understanding of how these spaces where young people can interact with one another and key youth workers help to facilitate social wellbeing. Within the answers given by the young people, there were multiple health, social and mental health benefits highlighted, as well as an important reliance on their relationship with their youth worker. This was particularly evident in wards 1, 2 and 3 where the youth workers alluded to difficult home circumstances and family estrangement for the young people who attend the groups. Participant 4 when describing the presentation of the film to parents and the local council said:

> I don't think a single parent came to see any of those shows and as a parent yourself, I was so proud… That's where I'm the advocate for them, cos I'm also a bit of surrogate parenting.

Similarly in ward 3, the youth worker was highlighted by other interviewees to be absolutely crucial in the lives of the young people, to the level that the young people asked the youth worker to aid with job applications, course applications, finding homes during turbulent family times, as well as liaising with the police on a regular basis to monitor the young people's behaviour. The youth worker herself said:

> P9: they have nobody. There is nowhere to go… I've grown up with these young people. I know the brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles of the group that I've got now.

This aligns with Coburn (2011) who states that the youth workers are those in the best position to aid these young people to be successful and develop their identities as they operate on a 'shop-floor' level where they understand these people and their wider circle. From this, there is the development of trust and reciprocity, both of which are determined by Putnam (2000) to be key components when developing social capital. Putnam (2000) also states that it is the quality of the interaction and how meaningful they

are that determine the volume of social capital. The reliance on the youth workers in all wards demonstrates this with participants 13 and 15 saying:

P13: you've got to build up that trust up with them otherwise they wouldn't sit and have that conversation [referring to sexual health/ family crisis]. If that young person trusts you and they feel safe with you… but they're not going to sit there all of a sudden and go this happens, unless they really trust you.

P15: It [youth group] builds on those relationships, like you could see how powerful the relationships were already for the girls in [ward 1]… told her [youth worker] everything, everything they're going through. And if it wasn't for them to go to, would they be telling someone at school? Could they be telling a parent? I don't think so. And where does that leave them? Some of them have felt suicidal.

The role of the youth worker in these youth groups was discussed as vital to the young people continuing their engagement with the youth group, activities and even as far as further education and schooling. From the researcher's own observations between interviews at ward 3, the young people arguably demonstrate that youth workers are valuable professionals who must be credited for their approaches and resilience in what is a turbulent sector (Bradford and Cullen 2014). The role of the youth worker lends itself congruently to the benefits of participating as spoken by the young people.

During their time as a member of their youth groups, all participants stated that they felt an increase in their self-esteem and confidence levels, suggesting that their participation in the youth group positively contributed to their sense of social wellbeing and evolving habitus (Bourdieu 1984; Putnam 2000; Hoye and Nicholson 2008). As habitus is defined as embodied social learning, where thoughts, practices and behaviours can become second nature, the active participation of these young people in this groups are arguably crucial if the youth of today are to be viewed differently by wider society. However, as little research has been conducted that allows these young people to voice their thoughts and opinions (Bradford and Cullen 2014; Nolas 2014), this study evidences the benefits and necessity that youth groups are essential to semi-rural life. The following data demonstrates the answers given by several participants when asked to specify the benefits of attending the youth group:

P2: It helps with your mental health and like your social- I wouldn't' be able to speak as much if it want for these groups, cos how bad I used to get with anxiety and everything. It's calmed down my anger.

P3: before I started coming to this group, I hardly had any- that many friends… My mum said I had to go and then I started coming and since then, I've been in no trouble.

P5: it's done my behaviour a lot better. I used to smoke weed and stuff.

P10: I've been to interviews now for jobs, and I've gotten the job and I think before that, I would have been a lot more shy and a lot less confident.

P12: It keeps us out of trouble.

Comparatively, the youth workers spoke on the benefits of the groups from their front-line positions:

P4: I can see lots of different health benefits and socially yeah, just the fact that it's their chaotic lifestyles, having a couple of regular things that they can go to, or not go to… that doors always open.

P9: Here, nobodies expecting them to say anything, so if they do want to say something, it's in a very relaxed… because they're talking in front of their friends… it's almost like a therapy group. It's more about raising their confidence, their self-esteem, showing them you don't have to be the brain of Britain to get on in life, there are other ways of doing it.

P13: Oh, massive for mental health… just social interaction. Young people and mental health is the big issues that everyone's looking at, but for young people to get them out the houses, get them away from either from siblings or whatever else is kicking off in the house, get them off the streets for a couple of hours.

P14: They're given guidance and I think by us role modelling, they see that, if they're left to wander the streets they're going to fall into bad habits. It's about listening to their voice, it's about being socially included, look at us, we're here, listen to us, we make sense, we're not the bad guys.

P15: I think these kind of projects are vital for that bridge or spring board for young people to move forward into things because I've always felt this about education that you're sort of a passive recipient of information and you learn loads more by getting about something on a project basis [film example].

Nolas (2014, p.26) argued that to understand youth work and its success or failures for future policy implementation, we need a more 'nuanced understanding of what young people get out of their participation in youth spaces' and arguably, these interviews provide evidence to aid in this knowledge area. These young people use youth groups and the space for a variety of different reasons, and the way a youth group operates allows the young people a sense of belonging and at the same time freedom to attend when they wish without penalty (Nolas 2014). In the cases of those interviewed, this could be said to have made positive pathways towards their development of social capital and in turn, both bonding and bridging capital due to their improved confidence and sense of connectedness (Hoye and Nicholson 2008). Furthermore, the youth workers are crucial to how these young people interact with one another and the wider community, as will be explored in the next section.

The importance of youth groups, anti-social behaviour and citizenship in relation to social identity

Arguably closely linked to the benefits of participating in a youth group, several interviewees alluded to the importance of maintaining youth groups despite battling against austerity in Britain. Participant 13 discussed the rise in available technologies and how this is impacting how young people interact with one another as it is now much easier to talk to someone from Australia for example, from a house in the UK:

you don't learn that sat in a bedroom or sat in a, you've got to sit and have a face to face conversation… It's important that young people have a place to go, whether it's a youth shelter or a youth club. You need that, I think as I say, it's huge, almost like a pack animal, we need that interaction. You start being isolated. And then you learn to like that isolation and it just, it's not good for our mental health, it's not, we are a social species, we need to be together.

Participant 14 changed roles during the research period and left Ward 2 at the same time that a new group of young people joined the group. They stated that the role of youth groups is vital in current times due to the increase in county lines, knife crime and anti-social behaviour. After attending a session to cover for another member of staff back at the youth group with the new young people, participant 14 appeared concerned that the group was not functioning to the best of its abilities and engaging the young people in the most appropriate activities:

a lot of those kids that just need to come in; they were troublesome last night, very troublesome, but we don't know what's going on at home. And if we can keep them in and engage with them, you've got to build up that relationship first before they get involved in any activity. You've got to make sure the activities are appropriate. it's [youth service provision] needed more so now because of knife crime, the culture that they're living in. Social media, drugs, risky behaviours, alcohol, knife crime it's massive. We are working with some children

from [country] and certainly war-torn countries. These children could be radicalised.

This highlights that not only are youth groups vital in offering young people a place to go that is a safe, informal learning space that provides the opportunity to develop both their social and cultural capitals, that the involvement of the youth worker and choices of activity put on are still vital for the young people to develop positive social identities. This aligns with findings from Pope (2016) who suggests youth workers are caught between a rock and a hard place where they feel obliged to deliver sessions to meet government policies, yet, feel the need to provide a service tailored to the specific group of individuals that attend. This highlights the complexity of youth provision and whilst planning the right methods of approach for content delivery will be challenging in the future, the rise in austerity makes that challenge significantly difficult (MacDonald and Shildrick 2007; Youdell and McGimpsey 2014). The very nature of this project highlights further the challenges youth service provision is facing when Ward 4 was unable to provide a youth group setting for the interviews during the allocated time frame. The previous group had closed, and the new group was experiencing operational difficulties such as venue confirmation, which delayed the start of the group. The reality of the closure of the first group was highlighted by the ward's youth worker:

> P13: it closed down last October, it closed down due to funding cuts from [county council] youth service. They used to get 40, 50 young people in that room every Wednesday.

This brings into context the fact that the closure of youth services in this semi-rural area could perhaps lead to 40, 50 young people with no safe place to go, resulting in groups hanging around on the streets of ward 4. This vicious circle could perpetuate wider societies moral panic regarding these groups of young people, potentially grounding any possible developing social and cultural capital (Hoye and Nicholson 2008; Cohen 2011).

Despite the youth service sector seeming to teeter on the edge of provision or no provision, in agreement with Cooper (2012), participant 9 stated that the rise in austerity has resulted in '70% less youth provision'. However, this study did highlight some areas of success in the development of cultural capital and social cohesion. This was through working with others in the wider community, such as the elderly and the homeless as per findings from Coburn (2011). All of the young people interviewed suggested that people in the wider community view them as troublemakers and the cause of anti-social behaviour in their local area, yet despite this, the young people in ward 1 in particular were determined to challenge these stereotypes by engaging in activities with the wider community:

> P1: the aim is to like help out in the community, but then as a side thing, try to show people that – who we actually are, instead of them thinking that we're troublemakers. if they see a group of us, they're like scared to come up, like walk passed us and things. Even though we're not like horrible people. We have feelings and we care about other people.

> P4: we went round to where a lot of elderly residents live to plant some planters and plants in the garden and they were brilliant with us, they just loved it, it would have touched your heart strings. They, and I don't wanna say names and one or two particularly were just like, I've never met an old person who's been lovely like that to me.

Similarly, and in keeping with issues within wider society, participant 14 who organised a police workshop regarding County Lines, stated how positively the session was received by the young people:

> the police came one evening and they just described it with a Cadburys boss and a Rowntree's boss and one's sitting in one place and the others sitting in another place and they decide they're not going to do the work, they'll get the little minions to, and they all got it and

said, wow, is that how they do it? I mean that's huge impact on their thinking, on their awareness of dangers, on their awareness of being safe.

Although it is not within the context of this study to discuss and analyse the prevalence of anti-social behaviour in the 4 semi-rural wards, participant 9 of ward 3 which had a public space protection order covering the area, suggested that the work of the youth group was vital in reducing anti-social behaviour in the area:

> NH: Anti-social behaviour then, is it quite prevalent in this area?

> P9: It was, cos there's a public space protection order on the area because of the anti-social behaviour… I don't say it's all our intervention… but it has reduced considerably. The last time I spoke to the district council at a meeting there had been no reported anti-social behaviour in the area of the public space protection order for 9 months. So, whether that worked, and our intervention worked? I think it might be a mixture of both.

This aligns with Cooper's (2012) suggestion that if youth service provision is cut regardless of whether it is in a rural or urban area, anti-social behaviour will increase as the young people feel socially excluded. These wards demonstrate the depth the youth workers are going to, to offer their young people the chance to positively develop their social identities. Furthermore, the work in these youth groups could be determined as successful due to the differing ways it is delivered in comparison to school / academia. Engaging in interactions with others outside of one's usual network through bridging capital can positively contribute to increased cultural capital (Hoye and Nicholson 2008).

However, there does appear to be one area of knowledge and understanding where the young people would benefit from some additional interventions and that is understanding citizenship and being a citizen of the local area/nation. When asked what their understanding of the word citizen was there were mixed responses:

> P1: Someone who lives in a certain area, who plays an important part in the community.

> P3: I don't really know cos it doesn't really mean anything really.

> P8: It's a member of society.

> P11: No. I don't understand that.

> P12: Pedestrians?

Additionally, the young people's understanding of citizenship and what it means to them was also very varied:

> P1: Helping out, helping everyone, like no matter how big it is or how small.

> P2: It's a sense of belonging, I guess.

> P7: Somebody that lives in the country, somewhere that has a place that you can call home.

> P8: always be helpful and try to be the best you can be.

> P10: by keeping out of trouble.

These responses indicate a very mixed understanding of citizenship which could be explained through Putnam's (2000) ideas around social class determining the level of education and success in education; further research in this area is required to tease out these nuances further. According to Glover (2004), to increase the understanding and sense of citizenship, community centres can develop a sense of positive citizenship through reciprocity and trust. However, Glover's (2004) study did not discuss the finer nuances of the activities that took place in the Canadian community centre. This study, however, has sought to understand the range of activities completed, their success rates and the benefits to the participants. Thus, it could be said that by continuing with the level of engagement and activities that are operating in these semi-rural areas as discussed, combined with new workshops designed to understand citizenship and the young person's role as an individual in wider society, these young people would have a greater opportunity to develop their social mobility and social capital (Putnam 2000; Glover 2004). Arguably, by

educating the young people in this area but in the more informal setting of a youth centre, these young people should have the opportunity to increase their level of social capital, whilst evolving their sense of identity regardless as to their individual social class (Putnam 2000; Sullivan 2001; Coburn 2011; Nolas 2014). According to Putnam (2000), this could make life easier for the community as a whole, as it could increase its volume of social capital. However, these youth groups arguably challenge Putnam's idea that social class determines education success when the young people in these areas are developing their social and cultural capital levels. Finally, Agnitsch, Flora and Ryan (2006) assert that if social capital is to work as it is doing for these young people, that the government needs to provide an environment from which it can operate, i.e. continued and new funding across the youth sector.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to answer the three research questions outlined at the start of the study. To do so, 9 key themes derived from thematic analysis were used to format the chapter and structure the reporting of the data. This chapter has explored the role and importance of youth centres by evidencing the voices and opinions of a marginalised group of young people in the semi-rural North of England. It has also critically evaluated the youth centres' abilities to provide sessions that have wider benefits to the local community and thus the young people involved, which have shown to have positively contributed to reduced anti-social behaviour and increased cultural and social capital. There will now follow a concluding chapter to summarise the project, the key findings and outline possible avenues for future research and interventions.

Conclusion

Overview of findings

The aim of this study was to explore and evaluate 4 wards in the North of England in a commissioned piece of research for a local organisation. Using a case study design, this project conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with young people and youth workers/ personnel from 4 semi-rural wards provided by the commissioners. The aim of the study was to provide an evaluative report on the role the youth groups play in each of the wards, whilst analysing the success of a variety of activities the young people engaged in. Furthermore, the project sought to gauge how the youth groups are used by the young people and how this relates to positive social identities for the participants. The key findings of this study include that youth service provision is a complex sector where youth workers are constrained by policies such as Positive for Youth (HM Government 2011) to provide educational sessions, when the young people desire a safe place to engage in informal activities. Generally, the activities provided were successful and the young people expressed a continuation of autonomy over activity choice and the groups to continue operating as they are. A key finding of this report was also the reliance of the young people on their youth workers, suggesting that consistency of staff in this sector is fundamental if social capital opportunities are to be taken and developed. Additionally, austerity in Britain remains a challenge for the day-to-day operations of youth groups, yet the group's ability to be a positive influence over anti-social behaviour and moral panic is significant in these areas. Finally, this study drew upon concepts from Putnam's (2000) notions of social capital; specifically, bonding and bridging capital to offer explanations for the findings, which will now be discussed in more detail in relation to each of the research questions.

A summary of the study

This study provides evidence to answer research question number one that the role of the youth groups in the North of England are extremely vital to the young people within the semi-rural areas. The participants were able to list a variety of activities that they enjoyed and reasons for their engagement included a safe place to go, a place to get off the streets and out of trouble, and a place to engage in opportunities that were not available in their family environment (Nolas 2014). This demonstrates the similarities between rural and urban youth groups (Nolas 2014; Sharpe et al. 2019). The analysis of the film workshop that was a requirement of the commissioners of the research showed only positive benefits of the project with the young people citing increased confidence levels and thus development of their social and cultural capitals (Coburn 2011). In line with Sullivan (2001), participants alluded to the differences between school and youth group as significantly important to their experiences and personal benefits. This suggests that policies such as Positive for Youth, although aimed at improving the success rates of young people into further education and careers are still too focused on education, despite existing research and key findings from this study evidencing that young people engage in youth groups for more than just education (Pope 2016; Sharpe et al. 2019).

What this study shows is that it is the variation of activities and the importance of the youth workers that result in positive engagement from this young people, ultimately building on their habitus and volume of social capital. When considering this in terms of Putnam's (2000) work, this would suggest that the youth groups are raising young people's confidence to engage in activities within the wider community, challenge negative stereotypes and engage in higher education. Furthermore, this challenges Putnam's application of social capital, as he states that social class is a determinant factor in the volume of social capital to

be accrued. Whilst this study cannot explicitly agree or disagree with this ideology, it would be fair to say that these young people demonstrate a willingness to overcome the barriers to wider society that they face as a result of their demographics. Participant 10 was a clear example of this. A young person with an estranged family, a history of being in trouble, who attended the youth group, engaged in some activities such as the film workshop, saw a rise in confidence and perceptions of their abilities and is now successfully attending higher education. This participant was not the only success story as the data shows.

The data from this study demonstrates the youth groups positively foster a sense of collective wellbeing for the young people (in relation to research question 2). As already highlighted, the significant difference between the school and youth group environments allowed the young people to explore their own identities and engage with others from different social backgrounds, facilitating their bonding capital. The levels of trust and reciprocity between youth workers and young people was extremely high, with participant 4 alluding to her role as an 'advocate' or a surrogate parent. With many young people coming from turbulent family homes, the youth group offers a place of calm and regular stability where appropriate activities enable their social wellbeing (Coburn 2011; Sharpe et al. 2019). Each of the wards demonstrated through their work with wider communities such as the elderly and the homeless, how youth groups are indeed spaces where cultural capital can be developed in an informal educational setting (Sullivan 2001). By engaging in these activities, the young people were determined to show their local community that there is a reduced amount of anti-social behaviour and thus there should be less moral panic in the area and more social cohesion (Harris 2010). Participant 14 stated that in relation to research question 3, the engagement with the elderly and local council showed a link towards positive social development for these young

people, which ultimately enables their habitus and social identity (Putnam 2000). The main challenge faced by all these youth groups was the continuation of the cycle of austerity that youth service seems permanently fixed in. In 2011/2012, Cooper (2012) stated that youth service cuts would see a rise in anti-social behaviour and although there is no hard evidence to prove this would be the case for these 4 wards, the clear positives of these youth groups leads one to conclude that there would be several hundreds of young people in semi-rural areas with no support, should funding be cut further. At the time of writing this project, the UK was hit by the coronavirus pandemic, rendering all public services closed until further notice. It can only be guessed at the impact of the loss of these groups on this temporary basis will have on these young people.

Limitations and future research recommendations

Upon reflection, there are some possible limitations to this study. As per the nature of research, the original plan was to interview 16 participants including young people and youth workers from the 4 wards identified by the research commissioners. Unfortunately, due to funding cuts, ward 4's youth service was not available and operating during the research period. Therefore, the youth worker for the area was interviewed and it was agreed that additional young people would be interviewed at the 3 remaining wards. On arrival at ward 3, one young person declined to participate in the interview and so a total of 15 interviews were conducted. It could be said that engagement with each youth group on an observational/attendance basis prior to conducting the interviews may have been beneficial, as this would have meant that participants knew the researcher prior to engaging in the interviews. This could have then led to more detailed interviews, although this cannot be proved. With the youth session in full swing during the interviews, it was at times, difficult to maintain the engagement of the young people when they wished to be back with their friends doing the activities. Ideally, a room further away from the sessions would mean that the young person could have concentrated better; however, the buildings where the interviews took place, meant that this was not possible. Additionally, there were times when opportunities for further probing may have gleamed a more detailed answer to the questions; however, this could be linked to the fact that the young people and the researcher had only met on the day of the interview.

Future research in these 4 wards could look to examine the prevalence of county lines further as although workshops had been conducted, the extent of this issue and the impact on these young people is relatively unknown. Another research angle could focus on the implementation of learning and teaching theories used in mainstream education in a youth group setting in comparison to youth group learning environments in mainstream education. This could further our understanding of how to best aid these young people in personal and educational attainment. Moreover, a study examining the older young people (ages 16+) in these areas would enlighten us at to the transitions these young people make into the next stages of their lives, which could provide us with a more holistic understanding of what to provide in the youth sessions leading up to their transition. Finally, in light of recent events, future research could look to explore the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic on youth provision and indeed these young people interviewed. At the time of writing, the coronavirus lockdown in the UK highlighted how cultural daily activities are linked with wellbeing and mental health and as such the cancellation of group activities such as these groups may lead to an impact on the wellbeing of the young people. A study of this nature would arguably provide a more holistic picture of the impact of a lack of services on the lives of the young people.

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