

## Federation for Detached Youth Work

### Amended supplementary guidance for detached youth workers on COVID-19: 24/03/20.

*While forceful, this guidance is not meant to be prescriptive; its aim is to support your professional decision-making*

The Federation for Detached Youth Work recognises that COVID-19 demands a re-assessment of the health and safety, and safeguarding implications of undertaking detached, outreach and street-based youth work at this critical time. Given the closure of centre and other building-based provision, the work of detached youth workers may take on an even greater importance in coming months.

To be clear: while almost all youth centres, youth employability services etc. have been suspended, in many places detached and outreach work, while subject to restrictions, is continuing. Social Care Services are still open, although, where possible, their work (like youth work generally) has become remote / moved online. Social Care Services will maintain a commitment to direct delivery, especially given heightened concerns about issues of child protection, child/family abuse, domestic violence and neglect at this time, particularly as schools are now closed (as they are the places where child protection concerns are typically initiated). Detached workers can support them in this work.

If you are a detached youth worker, what does this mean for you?

Certainly, young people will need continued support from professional and knowledgeable staff; but it is essential these staff remain healthy. As in schools and other children and young people-focused services, you must absent yourselves from work if necessary, to protect yourself, those you normally work with, and the wider community. Workers who have any health vulnerabilities, or have caring responsibilities toward those that do, should not be working. Others may decide they are not confident in doing street-based work at this time; that is fine, explore then with colleagues other contributions you can make – they are many. All this will have an inevitable impact on service levels. It is essential then that those workers who undertake detached work do so but in a careful way.

At this point in time there is no clarity as to whether detached youth workers (or youth workers *per se*) are reasonably considered as ‘key’, ‘essential’ or ‘critical’ workers. As such, they are not subject to the support / expectations government have to-date announced. Indeed, we know only too well youth work is not a mandatory service. Notwithstanding, there is a wide variety of workers working in proximity to potential infection and transmission who are not classified as ‘critical’. This is not to say their work is unimportant, clearly it is. The guidance here is not to wait until there is a national announcement – it may never come. Be proactive: use your professional judgement to inform the work you do, and be responsive to changing circumstances and guidance (both locally and nationally). What’s needed is a

sober assessment of degree and the contribution that can be made. The question for you as a detached youth worker is whether you are providing essential services; you should decide this in consultation with providers of other local services.

National agencies are working hard to clarify the role and status of youth work in the current national context; let's say youth work has (as of now) been missed, but be confident, efforts are underway to clarify this / our status, conceivably as a key/critical/essential service. There will be updates about this as further information becomes available. **But we can say this: currently detached youth work has a definite role to play.**

### **Maintaining a commitment to principles**

- Detached youth work has always been a context-appreciative practice; this is more important than ever in light of COVID-19. This said, we wish to re-assert the nature and principles of detached youth work as a practice based on informal education and constructive dialogue.

### **A modified focus**

- The specific focus should be on supporting the hubs, social work teams, and schools (there may be contributions you can make within them).
- At present, the role, intention and purpose of detached youth work should focus on safeguarding young people. In this context, it is only reasonable that detached work continues provided it is focussed on assessing needs - especially in relation to young people who are / might be considered to be 'at risk'. Above all, think 'risk assessment' and 'safeguarding'. Importantly, detached workers may know of / have concerns about young people not in the scope of Social Care services.
- With this in mind, ensure the work is explicitly targeted. In the current context, your mission is to act as an early warning service for Social Care, almost as if you were a social worker. Have in mind working on the boundaries of social care, where necessary, bringing young people into a safety net - there may be an increase in cases of abuse, harm and neglect, as young people and families become more socially isolated. Your role is to communicate any concerns directly to Social Care; signpost, link to, refer, as appropriate. Above all, the question for detached youth workers is: How can the vulnerable be supported at this time? Remember, you may be that trusted adult in a young person's life; you may have a relationship with them that no other does, and have therefore a duty of care toward them and others who may be on the boundaries of social care.
- In practice, the work must be about asking questions - in order to assess needs. This will include exploration of what is happening at home, and the health and welfare of those within. For this, you will need precise and up-to-date information. The practice should not be about 'general' youth work. Any on-going work can only justify itself on the basis of providing support for the most vulnerable. As such, the totality of the work must be reduced; the aim is to minimise contact.

- Further practice dimensions include helping young people make sense of what is going on, at home, in their schools, communities and wider society. Young people need accurate information, advice, guidance, and opportunities to ask questions and discuss their feelings and anxieties. At times, you may need moral arguments: what about the implications of behaviours for grandparents, for example?
- Facilitating young people's continued social interaction now requires carefully managed environments, principally on-line. This will be important in counteracting the negative effects of the social isolation that will inevitably follow from constraints on young people's movements.
- It's probably reasonable to argue staying indoors constantly will have a significant negative effect on young people's health and well-being. Encourage them to undertake the modest amounts of exercise they are allowed to do, but to do so safely.
- Be positive. Try not to be negative or contribute to the stress they may be feeling; indeed, there may be many other positive responses to the current situation. Encourage young people to take up or revisit hobbies and interests, do creative things, to make music, paint and draw perhaps, and post image of their work on-line. There may be peculiar opportunities afforded to being static for a while. Young people writing letters to neighbours, for example, will help them contribute to community and social action in a safe way.
- There is a logic in using the next few days to promote as fervently as possible remote and on-line services and explain to young people that on-the-street detached youth work services may be withdrawn at any time. Remember though to check the efficacy of your communications and such 'connectivity', it should be reviewed and evaluated often; don't assume just because you have created a digital youth work platform it's working. Ask, and ask the young people that are using it if they know of others who are not, or who are finding it difficult to do so.

### **Messaging**

- Above all, we need to communicate a clear message to young people: that they should go home and stay as safe as possible. The only caveat to this (i.e. in exceptional circumstances) is the need for social care/social work-oriented intervention where workers judge there are safeguarding issues and where home may constitute a danger. You should communicate directly with colleagues in social care and aim to support young people under their direction.
- We are in unprecedented times and the idea of telling young people to 'go home' may seem at odds with our historical desire to support them and encourage them to value public space; indeed this has echoes of a control function we would typically resist. We need to be vigilant about this; this is not an 'either/or' situation: protecting rights is as important as protecting health: think 'and/also'.
- However, in the context we have now, it is vitally important to keep as many young people as safe as possible by asserting the message: 'Go Home'. To reiterate again, the only exceptions are those young people most vulnerable, where we judge home is not a safe place.

## Keeping safe

- It is more important than ever that the specific role and professional boundaries of detached youth workers are informed by good decision-making and both generic and dynamic risk assessments. As part of this process, you should seek support from local multi-agency working groups before detached youth work takes place. Time needs to be given to develop risk assessments prior to street-based work. Authority to undertake work should be secured only with managerial guidance. Reflect on your limitations and abilities.
- Treat your working environment as a protective factor. That said, while work in public and other open spaces has fewer risks than indoors, risks exist nonetheless. The space we work in should remain as much as possible outdoors; this affords the possibility of working at a safe distance and makes possible putting into practice safe-working protocols. Even though these environments are typically well-ventilated, maintaining a safe distance from others is essential. Young people should be strongly encouraged to do the same, and follow wider hygiene advice such as avoiding physical contact, and 'catch it, bin it, kill it' practices in relation to coughing and sneezing. Here the detached worker's kit bag will need to be supplemented to include tissues and hand sanitiser etc. Remind them to wash their hands when they get home. Model good behaviour, especially the 2 metre rule; young people will learn as much from this as what you say.
- Workers should review and update as necessary practice guidelines and policies in this new context and continue to do so on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, dynamic risk assessments are essential; you should consider the location in which you are working, the size of the group you feel it is safe to work with (frankly, the smaller the better), proximity to other members of the public, and be vigilant and responsive to any symptoms those present may display. Remember that current guidance stipulates people should not gather in groups of more than two.
- Any young people displaying COVID-19 symptoms should be told to go home; advise them to contact health services. Check they do. Ultimately, you may need to withdraw from the situation and advise young people to do the same.
- There are accountability issues too; we are moving into an arena of targeted work with a global dimension. Perhaps more than ever we will be open to public scrutiny, particularly if we work in a way seen as encouraging young people to congregate outdoors and in public space. You must try to avoid this.
- In all circumstance, follow governmental and Public Health England advice, and that of the local authorities or organisations you work for or are working with.
- Ultimately, detached workers need guidance notes and protocols for engagement if they are going to work. These are important as the measures taken to keep safe are relatively simple and therefore easy to forget / disregard. They should include:

## Key points

- Before anything, establish your status **locally**. This means you should be in communication with the local authority, colleagues in Social Care and Health Services, the Police (there may, for example, be gang / Youth Justice dimensions to this, and you do not want to get knicked for being out there). Contact, as soon as possible, the emergent 'hubs' and steering groups, with the aim of clarifying what you might contribute to service provision for young people. Your status will be clarified, and this will help you clarify your purpose and intention (what role detached work can play in supporting the wider effort). Try to maintain a daily multi-agency point of contact. Speak to social workers, ask their advice.
- Take advantage of the fact that detached work takes place predominantly outdoors; stay outside and use this to maintain physical distance (minimum 2m). Avoid contact.
- Go through the process of creating a Safe Working Practices checklist - and adhere to it.
- Ideally, gloves and masks should be carried. Having wipes and sanitiser should be non-negotiable. Wash hands / use sanitiser often. Wipe all equipment down. Supplement your kit bag.
- Think about the little things; if a young person needs to sign something, give them the pen – don't ask for it back. Consider all 'points of contact'; don't pass mobile phones around (and discourage others from doing so). Think about 'after-care', taking your clothes off immediately on return home; boil wash, as appropriate. Follow intimately public and professional health guidelines.

## Maintaining a commitment to good practice

- The Federation is concerned that centre-based workers may be asked to undertake detached work without adequate preparation. While some may have experience of outreach work, others may have very little knowledge of detached work and possess very few of the street wisdom skills that they will need to keep safe. It is essential that those undertaking this work are as skilled and experienced as possible, this will protect them further. All will need opportunities to consider risk assessment, health and safety and safeguarding protocols, and personal protection measures, in the emerging context. They should be provided with the support and equipment needed to protect themselves (this means appropriate PPE). Safe working distances and exit strategies should be discussed, revised, and agreed upon, in advance and before engaging with young people. Workers must ensure they are prepared and have understood any revisions to policy and guidelines made at an organisational level and in the current (and evolving) context. Without these, the work should not take place.
- Federation for Detached Youth Work guidance maintains workers should work in pairs, and within this pair there should be an experienced colleague capable of dealing with challenging situations. At

present, and given the closure of youth centres, you should not be using detached youth work purely as a means to undertake generic street-based youth work.

- Workers should maintain a commitment to professional practice; they will need to up-date their knowledge constantly, and support each other as best they can. Supervision and reflective practice will become even more important; you will need to process and understand a lot of information over the coming months if you are to use it in the service of young people. Risk assessment will have a greater significance; remember though you will not be able to eliminate all risk, triangulate this with potential benefits, like keeping young people safe. Shift discussions with colleagues to street-based settings and on-line, as appropriate. In addition, continue to encourage organisations and employers to value your expertise and provide whatever support is needed to undertake this most important work. Contact the Fed. about your experiences and to share good practice, or simply if you need advice or someone to talk to.
- The following links provide useful reference material; they should be visited often, as good practice guidance is subject to regular and frequent change:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

- Communication should go through the newly established **Youth Work Support** portal: <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/>, which is being administered by the National Youth Agency (NYA). Everyone should use this as a single point of access for the youth sector.
- Share detached youth work-specific materials with the Fed. – what you are doing, your action plans (and the rationale behind them) etc.; we can integrate this into the Youth Work Support portal.

**A message of solidarity from *Dynamo International*, the network of social street workers:**

Dear members, since the Second World War, never before has a phenomenon, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, impacted so many people at the same time on a planetary level. Social street work everywhere has had to adapt to the situation; either by stopping the presence on the streets, or by supporting populations in street situations who are particularly affected by the virus - and this by taking the risks that you know.

For all of you, respect the health regulations which will allow you to protect yourself, your loved ones and the populations with whom you work. The countries that seem to best resist the consequences of the pandemic are those that had an anticipatory and preventive vision of public management, by having developed a quality health system open to all as well as a strong social protection system.

We will learn from this unprecedented experience and, in the future, remind authorities around the world of the importance of always favouring this preventive approach which favours the well-being of all. In this particular context we also have important missions. The first mission is to remain vigilant that fundamental rights are respected and are not sacrificed in the name of the fight against the pandemic. The second mission is due to the nature of our profession, the street social worker always seeks to highlight the positive sides in the worst situations. Let's stay with this positive vision and bring around us this hope for a better world.

**"Non quia timemus non audemus, sed quia non audemus, timemus" (Seneca). "It is not because we are afraid that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that we are afraid."**