

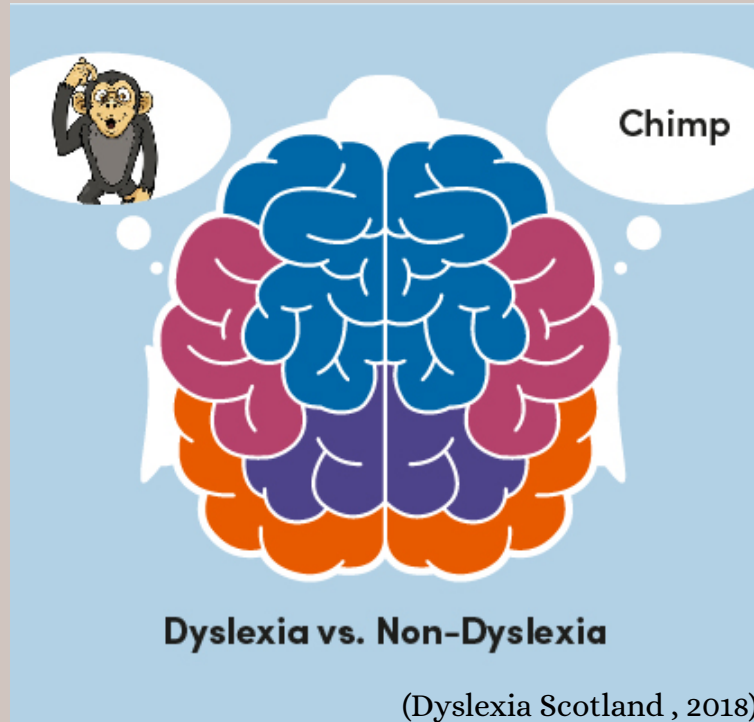
Policy, Practice and Legislation

Introduction

This assignment will explore key themes within the module on policy, practice, and legislation through five individual blogs, each linked to policies and frameworks in Wales. The topics will include dyslexia as a silent struggle, the impact of social media on mental health, healthy habits and well-being, children's rights, and youth work in Wales.

Each blog will critically examine how policy shapes practice and influences the lived experiences of young people. By exploring both the strengths and weaknesses within legislation and frameworks, this assignment will reflect on the relationship between policy and real-world implementation. Together, these blogs highlight the importance of legislation being more than just writing on paper; they represent a meaningful and empowering opportunity for young people across Wales.

WELL-BEHAVED BUT OVERLOOKED: DYSLEXIA A SILENT STRUGGLE.



Dyslexia is often defined by others as a learning difficulty, but for those who experience it, it involves far more than just academic struggles. Individuals with dyslexia frequently face challenges that go unnoticed in crowded classrooms, where more visible behavioural issues receive immediate attention and support. From my own experience, maintaining good behaviour in school meant that I was rarely regarded as a concern, which resulted in me navigating my difficulties alone and often suffering in silence. This raises an important question: Are schools doing enough to identify and support young people with dyslexia, or are some students being overlooked simply because they do not disrupt the classroom? Understanding dyslexia requires more than just quick courses or reasonable adjustments; it demands awareness of how dyslexia can affect a young person's confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This blog explores dyslexia as a silent struggle and reflects on its impact on young people who are often overlooked

MY EXPERIENCE OF DYSLEXIA IN SCHOOL

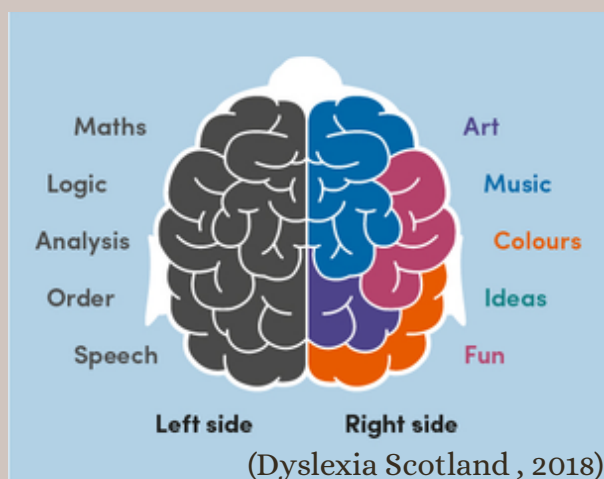
School often felt overwhelming, but over the years, I learned to mask my dyslexia by being confident and humorous in social situations. While this helped me fit in and build strong friendships, it also meant my dyslexia was less visible to teachers. Because I was considered well-behaved and did not disrupt class, I often felt overlooked, particularly compared to students whose behaviour was more challenging. As a result, those students were more likely to receive additional support.

Much of my anxiety at school stemmed from reading and writing, particularly when I am asked to read aloud. The fear of making a mistake in front of my classmates created a constant sense of dread and nervousness, significantly affecting my confidence. Comments such as "It's easy!" or expressions of surprise when I struggled with tasks others considered simple were particularly unsettling. Although these remarks were not usually intended to cause upset or harm, they highlighted how language, tone, and expressions used by others can unintentionally deepen the feelings of anxiety, distress, and isolation for those with dyslexia.

The wider impact of Dyslexia

Dyslexia remains a hidden challenge for many young people. Those who appear confident, quiet, or able to cope well in the classroom may be at a greater risk of falling behind, as their difficulties are less likely to be recognised. This can leave them feeling unsupported and inadequate, with long-term effects on their confidence and self-esteem.

When dyslexia is identified, it is essential that appropriate support is put in place promptly. Delays in identification or support can significantly affect a young person's ability to engage with learning. Facing these challenges alone may lead to increased anxiety around education and ongoing issues with self-confidence.



Supporting Every Learner

Dyslexia, if left undiagnosed, can significantly impact a young person's confidence, learning, and well-being. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 recognises the importance of addressing young people's learning needs; however, this is not always feasible in education settings. While individual development plans have shown how effective they can be when used properly, they are not always applied consistently or as intended in practice, especially when support is focused on managing behaviour.

Youth workers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between education and policy, building relationships and tailoring support to help young people reach their full potential and develop resilience and confidence. From my own experience, having someone who understands my learning needs made a significant difference. Combining personal insight with professional practice demonstrates how effective policy and tailored support can positively impact young people, especially those who may struggle in silence with dyslexia.

When Policy meets reality: Dyslexia and education in Wales

In Wales, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 emphasises the importance of supporting young people based on their individual learning needs rather than their behaviour. By adhering to this Act, education in Wales can ensure fairness and consistency (Welsh Government, 2018). However, in classrooms I have observed, while additional support is often available, it is frequently directed towards managing behaviour. As a result, learners who require extra support, such as those with dyslexia, may be left to struggle on their own. Consequently, the Act does not always operate as effectively as intended.

One positive aspect of the Act is that it implements the use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs). These plans provide clarity and consistency for both learners and professionals, allowing support to be tailored to the young person's needs. The Act recognises that no two learners experience learning difficulties in the same way, and when the IDP is implemented effectively, young people are more likely to feel acknowledged and supported.

Research supports the importance of individualised approaches, with Jeffs and Smith (2010) highlighting that one size does not fit all and that tailored approaches are an effective work method.

SCROLL, COMPARE, AND REPEAT.

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of young people today. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved beyond mere entertainment and staying in touch; they are now spaces where many seek new friendships, explore their identities, and often measure their self-worth.

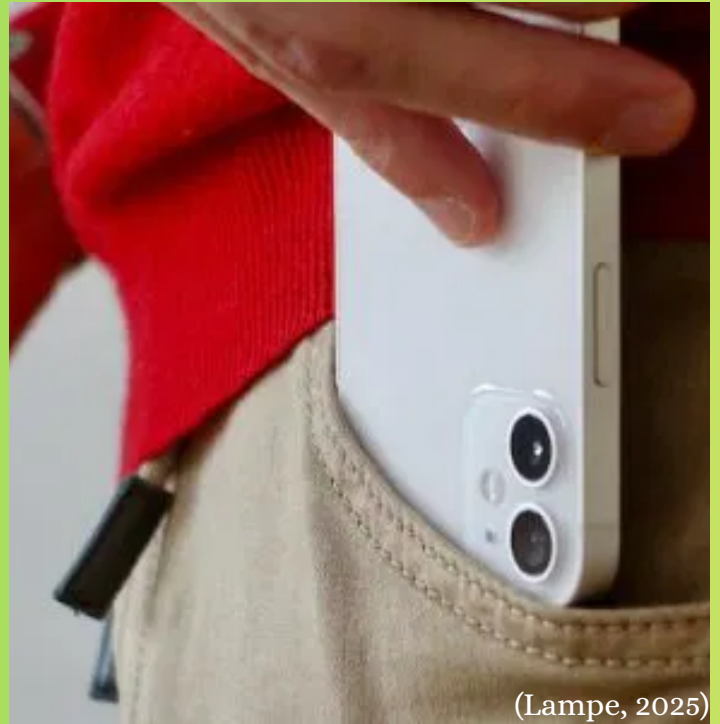
While social media offers a wide range of benefits, it can also create pressures through constant comparison and form unrealistic expectations. For many young people, exposure to filtered images and the need to maintain appearances can have a significant impact on their mental health, affecting confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This raises an important question: Are young people receiving the support they need to manage the effects of social media?

This blog will explore the relationship between social media and young people's mental health, focusing on the challenges they face and the role of support in promoting wellbeing.

Many young people spend significant time on social media. Media reports suggest that social media usage has increased by 38% over recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the biggest spike in daily usage (Elad, 2025). With so much time spent online, we need to ask ourselves: Is this affecting young people's mental health? Social media has become a platform to showcase appearances, lifestyles, and popularity. But how real is this world?

The pressure to gain followers and chase likes and comments is changing the way we present ourselves. For some, social media becomes a measure of self-worth rather than a tool for genuine connection. If you find that your experience on social media is positive—where likes, comments, and relationships contribute to your wellbeing—then that's great! But we must also consider how it affects the mental health and overall well-being of young people.

Social media isn't just about scrolling, comparing, and repeating; it can be a positive space to express creativity, reconnect, gain support, and share our thoughts. Learning how to use social media correctly and highlighting the various ways it can benefit our mental health would make a huge difference for young people, rather than letting them compare themselves to unrealistic expectations.



(Lampe, 2025)

Young people & social media today

Social media and Mental health



Social media can significantly affect the mental health of young people. Spending hours scrolling through content that often does not reflect real life can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Many young individuals find themselves comparing their lives to others, questioning why they don't look a certain way or live similar lifestyles. Additionally, social media promotes a culture of constant activity—whether it's climbing mountains, attending parties, or dining at fancy restaurants. This continuous exposure to perfect images can contribute to anxiety and low self-esteem (Megele, 2020).

For many young people, checking social media before bed often leads to hours of scrolling, disrupting their sleep. It is well-known that insufficient sleep can have a detrimental impact on mental and emotional well-being (Mind, 2024). Are young people truly aware of the negative effects social media can have on their mental health? Has the habit of scrolling and comparing oneself to others become the norm? While social media can foster connections and provide support, it can also become overwhelming without proper education and guidance.

Policy and reality: Mental Health and Social Media in Wales

The Online Safety Act 2023 introduces vital protections for children and young people by placing specific legal duties on organisations and platforms (UK Government, 2023). By enforcing this act, harmful and age-restricted content is effectively restricted, which helps safeguard our young and vulnerable populations. In theory, these measures are designed to minimise the risks associated with unsafe content and harmful predatory behaviour.

Alongside this, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act highlights the critical importance of protecting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people. This act strives to keep learners safe through collaboration aimed at meeting their well-being needs while fostering resilience in Wales (Welsh Government, 2015).

However, many young people still face pressure from social media that affects their confidence, self-esteem and sleep. Despite legislative efforts such as the Online Safety Act 2023 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, policies often fall short and aren't particularly engaging for young audiences. There are clear gaps here—gaps where education can step in to provide practical guidance. Megele (2020) highlights in her research that safeguarding online requires understanding the platforms that young people use.

By teaching young people about the realities of social media and raising awareness of its effects, we can provide the support and protection they need.

Providing targeted education on social media and online safety in schools can really help close the gap between what policies say and what happens in practice. While some policies focus on social media safety, others are aimed at building resilience and managing well-being. By putting these policies into action through education, they could move beyond words on paper and truly make a difference for young people.

Policy into practice: supporting young people

Even with solid and meaningful policies in place, young people still need guidance. Youth workers, educators, and parents can help bridge the gap by providing practical support through workshops, mentoring, or simple conversations. By working together with policy and real-life experiences, young people can develop better strategies to protect their mental health and well-being and to use social media more positively. After all, it's not all doom and gloom.



HEALTHY HABITS, HAPPY MINDS

Healthy eating is more than just occasionally consuming a piece of fruit; it is the foundation for young people's mental and physical well-being. In today's fast-paced, grab-and-go world, not all young people receive the nutrition they need to thrive. In my experience working in a school, I have noticed many young people come to class without having eaten breakfast, often relying on snacks or the school's provision of complimentary toast to get them through the day. Young people usually complain of stomach aches or struggle to focus, and many say they haven't had breakfast or lunch.

This raises a question about whether young people are being adequately supported in building healthy habits and relationships with food. This blog will explore the challenges young people face regarding eating, the effects on their health and well-being, and the role that policy plays in making a difference.



Young people & today's eating habits

Healthy eating habits may seem easy to maintain, right? However, many young people struggle to develop and sustain these habits in today's world. Busy lifestyles, financial pressures, and household responsibilities all contribute to the challenges of creating and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

In schools, it's often evident that young people are not eating "properly." Common signs of poor nutrition include low energy levels, stomach aches, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. Young people often rely heavily on sugary snacks or energy drinks to quench their thirst or satisfy their hunger, which can negatively affect their well-being. The energy spikes they experience are typically followed by crashes, which further complicate matters.

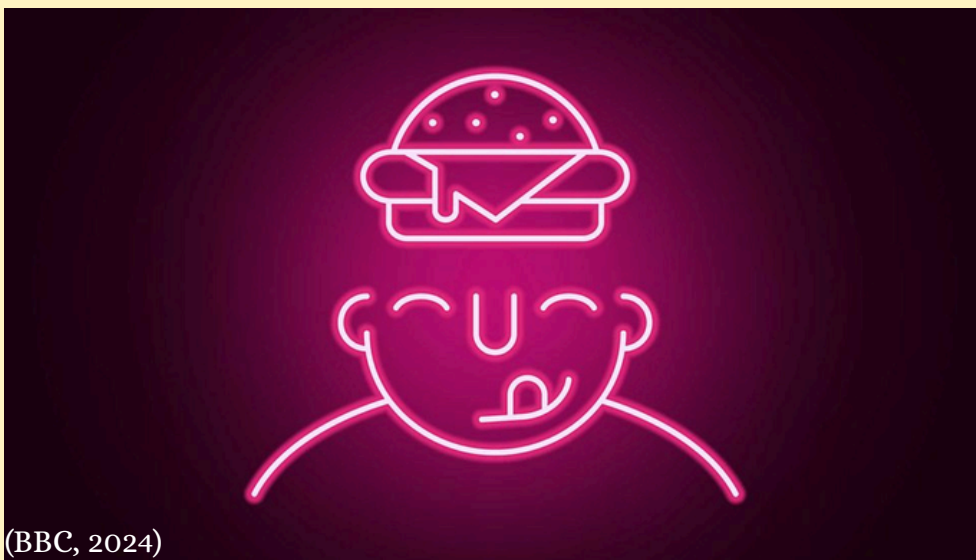
Social media also plays a significant role in this scenario, often prioritising convenience over nutrition. While not all young people are unaware of healthy eating, some may not fully grasp its importance or understand how their food choices can impact their mood, focus, and overall well-being.

The effects on healthy eating and wellbeing

Eating habits have a direct impact on a young person's physical and mental well-being. Skipping meals or replacing nutritious foods with high-sugar snacks and drinks can negatively affect concentration, leading to difficulties in retaining information and remaining engaged in learning activities.

Research on healthy eating supports this connection. The NHS states that eating a healthy, balanced diet helps individuals feel their best and provides the energy necessary for both physical and mental activity (NHS, 2022).

By educating ourselves and others about the relationship between food and well-being, we can better support the development of healthy habits and promote informed lifestyle choices that contribute to overall health.



Policy and supporting healthy eating in young people.

In Wales, promoting healthy eating among young people is not solely the responsibility of families and organisations; it is also a national policy priority. The Healthy Eating in Schools (GOV.WALES, 2025) plan and the School Food Standards 2005 (Legislation.gov.uk, 2025) provide a clear, structured framework to ensure young people have access to nutritious meals. These policies aim to improve concentration and physical health, recognising that healthy eating and overall well-being form the foundation for effective learning.

A positive aspect of these policies is that school lunch provision successfully meets the need for high nutritional standards by offering well-thought-out, balanced meals. Many young people benefit from improved focus and energy. However, there are still gaps, as is common in most policies.

From my experience working in a school, I have observed that many students arrive without having had breakfast. While school lunches are recognised as an important, morning nutrition and access to healthy snacks are less consistently addressed. Despite breakfast being available, I believe its significance in starting the day off in the best possible way is not emphasised enough.

Barasi (2013) highlights that consistent access to a balanced and nutritious diet supports physical and emotional well-being. Therefore, when young people miss breakfast, it suggests that policy intentions are not always fully achieved in practice .

Top 5 Tips for Supporting Healthy Eating

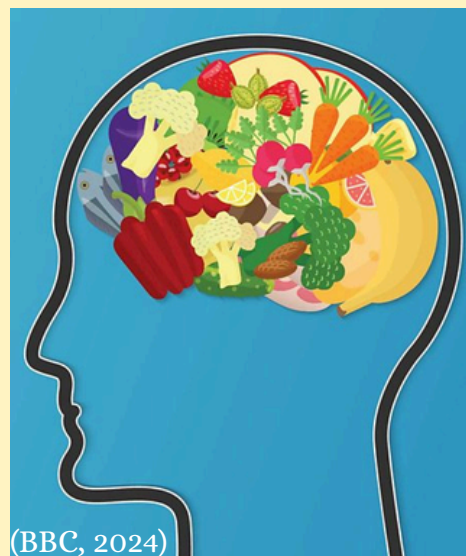
1. It is recommended to consume at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables every day. These can be fresh, canned, or frozen. You know the saying, "an apple a day keeps the doctor away"? It turns out it's a bit more than just that!

2. Stay hydrated. Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of water each day to prevent dehydration. Try to avoid sugary and fizzy drinks and remember to drink more water during hot weather.

3. Don't skip breakfast. This is an excellent opportunity to get vital nutrients and start your day off right.

4. Cut down on saturated fats, often found in fatty meats, butter, and cakes. Use healthier oils and spreads to stay within the recommended limits.

5. Include a good source of protein in your diet, which is often found in fish, along with a variety of other vitamins and minerals (NHS, 2022)



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: PROTECTED IN LAW, UNKNOWN IN PRACTICE?

Children's rights are firmly established in both international and Welsh legislation. These rights are not privileges for young people but rather legal entitlements that apply to all, regardless of background or circumstances. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child promotes the rights to protection, provision, and participation (UNICEF, n.d.). However, despite this strong legislation foundation, questions remain about how effectively these rights are realised in practice. Given that adults often dominate decision-making processes, it is necessary to ask whether children's rights are being implemented meaningfully and empowering. Wales has been a leader in promoting children's rights with its strong legislation; however, having these laws in place does not automatically mean that young people experience those rights in their everyday lives.

Strong on
paper,
limited in
practice?



The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 is strong because it places children's experiences, feelings, and well-being at the centre of policy decision-making. It demonstrates a clear commitment to empowering young people and recognises them as rights holders (Welsh Government, 2024). However, questions remain about how effectively these rights are implemented in practice. While the policy requires adults to have due regard for children's rights, it does not require them to transfer decision-making power. Adults may justify overriding young people's views on the grounds of age or perceived experience.

Jones and Walker (2011) emphasise that legislation alone is not enough to guarantee meaningful participation. Organisational culture and adult attitudes often limit children's ability to influence decisions, meaning that policy can appear strong on paper but remain largely in the hands of adults. This highlights a gap in Welsh legislation between the rights children are entitled to and the actual influence they can have in practice.

Participation or power imbalance?

While Welsh policy promotes children's participation in activities, the control often still lies with adults. For example, children have the right to play and make use of outdoor spaces. However, adults may limit these activities if they feel that large groups of children are intimidating, noisy, or possibly engaging in inappropriate behaviour. This can lead to children feeling discouraged from gathering in public, safe areas, potentially pushing them to less supervised, unsafe locations. This situation highlights the disconnect between what the policy states and how it is implemented in real life. Even though children have the right to play and socialise, adults and authorities can easily impose restrictions on these activities, which ultimately limit children's ability to influence how and where they use outdoor spaces. As noted by Jones and Walker (2011), adult attitudes greatly affect participation; often, when large groups of children gather, they are asked to leave, despite it being their right to play.



(UNICEF, 2025)

Conclusion and reflection.

The Welsh legislation shows a strong, meaningful commitment to children's rights and well-being, prioritising their needs in decision-making. However, these rights are not always implemented consistently in practice. Effective implementation is essential because, without it, young people's ability to participate is affected, and trust between young people and adults may be undermined.

YOUTH WORK IN WALES: DELIVERING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth work in Wales provides a safe environment for young people. Its voluntary nature offers a more relaxed and informal approach to guiding and supporting youth without judgment. This allows young people to feel valued, heard, and backed. Unlike statutory services, such as schools, youth work focuses on building meaningful relationships instead of exerting authority.

In Wales, youth work is increasingly recognised as a crucial service that contributes to the development and well-being of young people. The Welsh Government's policy, "Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People" (2024) (GOV.WALES, 2025b), demonstrates a commitment to supporting young people and outlines clear expectations for how youth work should be delivered by local authorities across Wales. This policy is designed to enhance opportunities for young people in practice, but it raises questions about whether it is seen as an essential support system or merely an added extra.

Strengthening Youth Work through policy

The Welsh Government's policy, Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People (2024), reinforces Wales's long-standing commitment to children's rights. Wales was the first nation in the UK to formally embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into legislation (UNICEF, n.d.), and it is encouraging to see this commitment reflected in youth work policy. The framework reminds local authorities of their responsibility to ensure that youth work is accessible and inclusive for all young people.

Another significant strength of the policy is its clear safeguarding expectations. The framework emphasises the importance of qualified staff, appropriate training, and safeguarding procedures, such as enhanced DBS checks. By ensuring that youth workers are skilled, trained, and supported, the policy creates a safe and trusted environment for young people. This not only protects them but also enhances the quality of support and guidance provided. When young people feel safe and respected, they are more likely to engage meaningfully and benefit from the support available to them.

Jeffs and Smith (2010) describe youth work as a form of informal education based on voluntary participation and the development of strong, organic relationships. This approach is reflected in the "Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People" (2024) policy, which emphasises safeguarding, empowerment, and inclusive access. By establishing professional standards in practice, the policy enhances the capability for effective youth work, enabling it to thrive.

I find this policy particularly positive. It clearly demonstrates that young people are not just being supported but are genuinely placed at the forefront of its delivery. The emphasis on making youth work accessible to all reflects Wales's commitment to children's rights, reinforcing the message that youth work is a space where young people can grow and thrive.

If you want to explore further about the Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People (2024) policy, just follow the link to take a look. Will you feel the same way as I do, or will you find gaps in this policy? Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people (draft guidance) [HTML] | GOV.WALES

What this means for young people

For young people today, this strong approach to youth work means greater accessibility and opportunity. Compared to when I was younger, youth work now feels more visible and more engaging. The visible presence of youth workers in schools and their outreach to isolated communities demonstrates a desire to make a difference and improve these communities. This reflects the policy's commitment to ensuring youth work is accessible to all and not limited to location or circumstances.

Clubs, activities, and trips offer young people experiences they might not have otherwise. These opportunities help them build confidence and make friends. Youth work provides more than just a safe space; it creates an environment for personal growth and fosters meaningful friendships that can shape and influence the future.

Having consistent youth work support can also reduce antisocial behaviour and improve well-being. When young people have appropriate adults to talk to who genuinely listen, they are more likely to feel supported and less isolated. This preventive element aligns closely with Welsh policy commitments, which prioritise well-being and early intervention. By investing in youth work, Wales is not only supporting young people today but also helping to shape their future.



(cycj.scotland, 2021)

Delivering for young people now and for the future

The Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People (2024) reinforces the importance of youth work as a structured and valued service in Wales. By continuing to embed and promote children's rights and to ensure youth work is accessible within its framework, the policy strengthens the practice of youth work. When effectively supported, youth work will continue to provide opportunities and build relationships. Overall, the policy demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting, empowering, and giving young people the space to thrive.

conclusion

The insights from these five blogs indicate that Wales has established robust policies and frameworks to support young people. These blogs discuss additional learning needs, online safety, healthy habits, and children's rights, highlighting a strong commitment to their well-being and empowerment.

That said, putting these frameworks into action can be tricky, as their success depends on how well they're understood and applied. This assignment emphasises the importance of closing the gap between policy and young people's real experiences. To truly support them, we need effective legislation along with compassionate practice that makes those policies work in the real world.

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