

Placement Portfolio

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This is my placement portfolio for my placement with Pembrokeshire County Council Youth Services. In my portfolio I have the following as listed below as part of the assignment. I have used my own experiences and the cornerstones of youth work to compile my placement experiences into my portfolio and have used references to support.

1. A Fact File of the work placement identifying the aims, objectives, vision and background of the organisation, include a mapping exercise of other services in the communities, along with roles and responsibilities of the trainee youth worker whilst on placement (800-1000 words)
2. Placement report drawing on examples and observations of good Youth Work Practice linked to theory and policy, and the cornerstones of youth work (1000 words).
3. A macro reflective account which summarises your own learning and development based on the successful completion of 250 hours on placement, identifying ways in which your learning can be applied to your future placement practice. Your summary should be linked to your professional development plan and your 6 reflective accounts, and underpinned examples from your practice and appropriate literature including the Youth Work National Occupational Standards (1000-1200)

A Fact File of Pembrokeshire County Council Youth Services

For my first placement for my Youth Work degree, I was placed with the School-Based Team within Pembrokeshire County Council. Pembrokeshire County Council has had a school-based youth worker for over 22 years. During this time, the structure and provision has changed hugely, but the mission and objectives have remained the same.

PCC's school-based youth work places professional youth workers in the school environment, with the aim of being the bridge between the young person, home and school. The service provides informal education, emotional support and encourages personal development, while participation from the young person remains voluntary. This helps to create a strong working relationship between the young person and youth worker, allowing them to work together towards what the young person would like to achieve. This could be personal development, academic goals, improving attendance, additional learning, sexual health education and much more.

The School-Based Team works across seven secondary schools in Pembrokeshire. As part of my placement, I attend Ysgol Greenhill, Milford Haven Comprehensive, Haverfordwest High and Neyland Learning Resource Centre. Each school has its own aims, outcomes and objectives, which are influenced by the needs of its pupils, the wider school community and the issues affecting young people locally. Because of this, the work carried out by the youth workers can look different depending on the school and the young people they are working with. The school-based provision is tailored to each young person through a person-centred approach, but within a school setting. It differs from traditional youth work that would usually take place in a youth centre or through outreach services, as the youth worker is working within a compulsory school environment. However, the important difference is that although the young person has to attend school, they do not have to engage with the youth worker. The choice to participate is completely theirs. I think this is an important part of school-based youth work, as it allows the young person to have control over whether they want support and what they want that support to look like.

Youth workers work alongside teachers, LSAs and other professionals within the school setting to identify young people who may benefit from additional support. However, the youth worker has a different role to other professionals within the school. They are not there to tell young people what they should be doing or to enforce school rules. Instead, they are able to build a different type of relationship with the young person and provide them with someone they can talk to in a more informal environment. Building relationships is a really important part of the work. A young person may not feel comfortable talking to a teacher or another member of school staff about something that is happening in their life, but may feel more comfortable speaking to a youth worker. The youth worker can provide a safe space where the young person feels listened to and is able to talk about things that may be affecting them. This could include things happening at home, friendships and relationships, their mental health and wellbeing, attendance, education or anything else that they feel is important to them.

The support provided is person-centred, meaning that the young person is at the centre of the work. The youth worker does not decide what the young person needs to achieve, but works alongside them to understand what they want and what support they feel would benefit them. Every young person is different, so the support they receive will also be different. One young person may need support with their attendance, while another may want to develop their confidence or talk about relationships. The youth worker can support them to identify their own goals and work towards these at a pace that is suitable for them.

The School-Based Team also works alongside other services when needed. This is important because a youth worker cannot provide every type of support a young person may require. They may need to signpost or refer young people to other services depending on their individual needs. This could include mental health services, sexual health services, safeguarding services, education and employment support or other organisations within the local community.

As part of my placement, I was able to look and learn about the services available within the communities surrounding the schools I attend. This included the Phoenix Project, the Vape Clinic, Military fitness training, volunteering for local events such as The Long Course weekend, The Princes Trust and The Duke of Edinburgh Awards to name a few. This formed part of my community mapping exercise. I looked at what support is available to young people and how these services could be accessed if a young person needed additional support or access to activities and projects outside of the school setting. This also helped me understand the role of the youth worker within the wider community and how different services work together to support young people.

My role as a trainee youth worker was to observe, learn and take part in the different areas of youth work carried out by the School-Based Team. This includes developing relationships with young people, supporting activities and sessions, learning how one-to-one work is carried out, understanding safeguarding and confidentiality, and developing my communication and professional skills. I am also still learning about the responsibilities that come with working with young people within a school and how youth work principles can be maintained within an educational environment.

Overall, I feel that the School-Based Team provides an important service to young people across Pembrokeshire. It allows young people to access youth work in a place where they are already spending a large amount of their time, while still giving them the choice of whether they want to engage. The relationship between the young person and youth worker is at the centre of the work, with the aim being to support young people with their individual needs, choices and goals.

Placement report

During my first placement, I was placed with the School-Based Youth Work Team within Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC). This gave me the opportunity to observe Youth Work being delivered within a school environment and to develop my understanding of what good Youth Work practice looks like in a setting that is based in a compulsory environment. Although school is a formal educational setting, I noticed that the Youth Workers worked hard to maintain the distinct principles of Youth Work and not simply become another part of the teaching staff.

One of the main examples of good practice I observed was the importance placed on building positive and trusting relationships with young people. Youth Workers were approachable and made themselves available to young people throughout the school day. I observed young people coming to speak to the Youth Workers about a range of issues, including relationships, friendships, school, home life and their feelings. The Youth Workers did not immediately try to solve the young person's problem. Instead, they listened, asked questions and allowed the young person to talk at their own pace. This demonstrated to me how important the relationship between a young person and Youth Worker is, and how voluntary participation was used in the school setting.

This links closely with the principles of Youth Work in Wales, which recognise that Youth Work is based on voluntary engagement and that young people should be treated as empowered partners (GOV, 2026). Youth Work also starts with young people wherever they are in their lives and recognises their potential. I observed this in practice because the Youth Workers did not judge young people based on their behaviour, attendance or circumstances. They took the time to understand the individual young person and what was important to them. A relevant highlight that I reflected on in practice relating to the statement above was when myself and my placement mentor finished a successful 1-1 with a young man. A teacher approached us afterwards and spoke quite derogatory about the young person based on previous behaviours and essentially wrote the young man off as a "waste of time".

Another example of good practice was the use of informal education. Although the Youth Workers were based within a school, their approach was different from that of teachers. Conversations and activities were often used as opportunities for young people to learn without feeling as though they were being formally taught. From my reflections, a conversation occurred around friendships and relationships, which developed the discussion around communication, boundaries, respect and decision-making. This showed me that learning does not always need to happen through a classroom lesson or structured teaching, and occurred when led by the young person and their needs at that moment.

The Youth Work Strategy for Wales identifies Youth Work as providing opportunities which are educative, expressive, participative, inclusive and empowering. It also describes the purpose of Youth Work as supporting young people's personal, social and educational development, while helping them to develop their voice, influence and place within society (GOV, 2026). I could see these principles within the school-based provision because young people were encouraged to express their opinions and make their own choices rather than simply being told what they

should do. Although it was primarily referral based within one of the schools I attended, the young people led the sessions and their own participation with their appointments, so they had active choices if they wanted or didn't want to attend or engage. I also observed the importance of participation. Young people were given opportunities to have their voices heard and to influence the support they received. This is particularly important within a school environment, where young people can sometimes feel that decisions are made for them rather than with them. The Youth Workers acted as facilitators rather than simply giving instructions. This helped young people to develop confidence and take ownership of their own decisions.

This links to a rights-based approach to Youth Work. The principles of Youth Work in Wales state that Youth Work recognises the rights of young people and seeks to work in a rights-based way. Whilst most importantly acknowledging every young person/child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters that affect them (GOV, 2026). I began to understand that this does not mean allowing young people to do whatever they want, but instead recognising them as individuals with their own views, rights and experiences. The Youth Worker can support a young person to understand their choices and responsibilities while still respecting and encouraging their voice.

A further example of good practice was the way the Youth Workers worked alongside other professionals within the school. I observed that school-based Youth Work often involves working as part of a wider network, while maintaining the Youth Worker's own professional role. Where appropriate, Youth Workers could work with school staff and other services to ensure that young people received the right support. This demonstrated the importance of partnership working while also showing why it is important for Youth Work to remain a distinct service. I observed my learning mentor working directly with the Inclusion and Wellbeing officer, who is also the assistant headteacher. They worked collaboratively to assess potential issues with absence, NEETS, educational issues, behavioural concerns and safeguarding. Which leans into the Welsh Government guidance.

The new Welsh Government statutory guidance reinforces the importance of collaborative working between local authorities, schools, voluntary organisations and other services. It also states that Youth Work should be accessible and inclusive and should respond to what young people need or want in their local area. (GOV, 2026). This helped me understand why school-based Youth Work can be so valuable. Young people are already within the school environment, meaning the Youth Worker can be accessible to them while still providing a different type of support from formal education.

Overall, my placement helped me understand that good Youth Work is not simply about running activities or providing support. It is about the way the Youth Worker works with young people. The relationship, voluntary engagement, informal education, participation, equality, inclusion, empowerment and rights-based approach are all important parts of the practice I observed. The experience also helped me understand that the cornerstones of Youth Work are not just theoretical ideas; they can be seen through everyday interactions between Youth Workers and young people.

My placement has therefore helped me to connect the theory I have studied at university with what Youth Work actually looks like in practice. I have developed a greater understanding of the importance of allowing young people to have a voice, building genuine relationships and creating a safe environment where young people feel listened to and respected. Most importantly, I have learnt that good Youth Work is about working with young people rather than doing things to or for them.

Macro Reflection

Completing 250 hours of placement has provided me with an opportunity to develop my understanding of youth work and, importantly, my identity as a student youth worker. At the beginning of my placement, I was unsure of my position within youth work and felt that my previous experience was very different from the role I was entering. My Professional Development Plan identified four main areas for development, understanding and applying the five pillars of Youth Work in Wales; facilitating young people's personal, social and educational development through informal education; promoting inclusion, equality and wellbeing; and developing my ability to work with young people and other professionals. Reflecting across my six reflective accounts, I can see progression in each of these areas, particularly in my confidence, communication, relationship-building and understanding of youth work practice.

One of my biggest areas of development has been understanding that youth work is fundamentally about relationships and creating opportunities for young people to participate, learn and develop. The National Occupational Standards (NOS) identify relationship-building, facilitating learning and working with young people in accordance with the core values of youth work as important areas of practice (YouthLink Scotland, 2019). This became particularly apparent during my placement at Greenhill School. Initially, I was nervous about entering the school environment and was unsure about where I fitted as a student. However, through conversations with young people and observing Shannon facilitate boys' and girls' groups, I gradually became more confident. The groups were young-person led, with discussions developing around topics such as feminism, misogyny, stereotypes, health and identity. This helped me understand that youth work does not always require the youth worker to provide answers. Instead, the role can involve creating a space where young people can explore their own thoughts and challenge ideas, in a safe, secure environment free of judgement.

This links closely to informal education, which was one of the key areas identified within my professional plan. My placement experiences have allowed me to see this in practice. At Neyland PRU, for example, I observed Taylor having an informal conversation with a young person about their wellbeing, physical health and medication. The conversation was relaxed and developed around what was important to the young person at that moment. Rather than feeling like a formal lesson, the young person was able to receive information and support through an

ordinary conversation. This helped me recognise the educational element of youth work and how learning can take place naturally within relationships.

I also experienced this through the tennis activity at the Edge Youth Centre. Although the purpose of the activity was primarily participation in sport, opportunities for conversation and relationship-building developed naturally. One young person spoke to me about becoming more physically active to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. This demonstrated to me that youth work can use activities as a starting point for wider conversations about young people's lives, interests and aspirations. The NOS recognises the importance of creating learning opportunities with and for young people and encouraging participation in activities that are relevant to their needs (NOS,2026).

Another area where I have developed is my understanding of inclusion, equality and challenging stereotypes. My experience at Haverfordwest High School was particularly significant. Taylor used a stereotyping activity with a young person, allowing us to explore both positive and negative stereotypes and challenge assumptions. The activity created a safe opportunity for the young person to discuss their own experiences. What particularly stayed with me was an interaction after the session, when another staff member made negative assumptions about the young person based on previous behaviour. I observed Taylor respond professionally, challenge the negative perception and focus on the positive relationship she had developed with the young person.

This experience reinforced the importance of not allowing labels or previous behaviour to define a young person. The NOS states that youth work should promote inclusion, equality and diversity and that oppressive or discriminatory behaviour should be appropriately challenged (NOS, 2019). It also helped me recognise that challenging stereotypes applies not only to conversations with young people but also to how professionals view and speak about them. This was an important development in my own understanding of anti-oppressive practice, and taught me how to handle the circumstance correctly.

My confidence in building relationships has also developed considerably. During the Long Course Weekend, I initially focused on supporting young people with volunteering roles, including giving medals and encouraging athletes. Through sharing the experience with the young people, I developed positive rapport and became more comfortable engaging with them. I noticed that conversations developed naturally around their own experiences, including young people who had participated in IronKids or had relatives taking part in the event. Similarly, during Futureworks, I used Real Talk conversation cards with a young person. What began as a simple activity developed into a meaningful conversation about healthy relationships and difficult personal experiences. This demonstrated the importance of creating opportunities for young people to speak when they choose to do so.

The Futureworks experience also made me reflect on professional boundaries. I could relate personally to some of what the young person shared, which helped me empathise with her, but it also made me recognise the importance of ensuring that my own experiences do not become the focus of the relationship. As a student youth worker, I am learning that being empathetic

does not mean sharing everything about myself. My responsibility is to listen, support and recognise when additional or specialist support may be appropriate. Taylor demonstrated this by offering further one-to-one support and identifying additional support available to the young person. This linked with my PDP aim of developing my ability to work with young people and others, while recognising the limits of my own role.

One of my most useful learning experiences came from the Dungeons and Dragons interaction during the tennis activity. Initially, the young person felt that I was not sufficiently interested in their activity and chose to continue it with their regular youth worker. I reflected negatively on my own practice and considered what I could have done differently. After speaking with their personal assistant, I was able to view the situation more objectively. I later apologised to the young person and offered to try the activity again, which resulted in a more positive interaction. This experience demonstrated to me that reflection is not simply identifying what went wrong; it involves considering why something happened and how I can adapt my practice. The NOS also identifies the importance of reflection, evaluation and using learning to improve future youth work practice (NOS,2026).

Looking back at my professional plan, I feel that I have made progress across all four areas identified at the beginning of my placement. I have developed a greater understanding of the five pillars of youth work through observing and participating in educative, expressive, participative, inclusive and empowering activities. I have developed my understanding of informal education through observing how ordinary conversations and activities can create meaningful learning opportunities. I have become more aware of inclusion, equality and challenging stereotypes, and I have developed my confidence in working alongside young people and other professionals.

However, completing 250 hours has also shown me that my development is ongoing. I still want to become more confident in leading conversations and activities rather than relying on observation, particularly in group settings. My experience at Greenhill showed me that anxiety can sometimes prevent me from becoming as involved as I would like. In my future placement practice, I want to challenge myself to take more opportunities to contribute, while continuing to seek guidance from experienced youth workers. I also want to further develop my confidence when young people disclose difficult or sensitive information, ensuring that I can respond appropriately while maintaining professional boundaries and understanding safeguarding responsibilities.

Overall, my 250 hours of placement have changed my understanding of what it means to be a youth worker. I began my placement feeling unsure about my role and questioning what I could contribute as a student. I now have a greater appreciation of youth work as a relational, informal and young-person-led profession. My experiences have shown me the importance of listening, encouraging participation, challenging stereotypes, creating safe spaces and allowing young people to have a voice. Most importantly, I have learnt that being a student youth worker does not mean I am expected to know everything. It means being willing to learn, reflect, seek guidance and continually develop my practice. I will take this learning forward into my future

placement, with the aim of becoming more confident, proactive and reflective in my work with young people.

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