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Introduction

Ord (2016, p. 14) states that “...youth workers are the key that unlocks the potential of the young person”. Through their voluntary relationship, youth workers are the facilitators of change, enabling young people to grow holistically to reach their full potential (Ord, 2016; CLD Standards Council Scotland (CLDSCS), 2019). The link between Youth Work, well-being, and resilience is that Youth Work is essential for promoting health and well-being (YouthLink Scotland, 2025). This is done by offering young people a variety of initiatives and activities designed to support their physical, mental, and emotional health (YouthLink Scotland, 2025). For instance, through Youth Work, young people have opportunities to access resources and support networks that help them lead healthier, more balanced lives, emphasising the importance of health, well-being and resilience (YouthLink Scotland, 2025). However, despite the strong evidence of Youth Work’s life-changing impact, its main limitation is funding, resulting in the lack of youth services available for young people across the UK (UK Youth, 2024). Nevertheless, youth workers often find creative ways to overcome funding limitations, to help support and empower young people’s well-being and resilience.

This essay draws on Youth Work theory, and my own experience in various placements across south-west Wales, to illustrate and analyse the potential for Youth Work practice to enhance resilience and well-being among young people. Firstly, the essay explores a social action project that I was involved with. This project focussed on young people’s mental health and wellbeing and helped raise awareness of the stigmas surrounding mental health. Secondly, it will examine a session undertaken as part of a school-based placement. This was a one-to-one session I created based on the young person’s needs.

Initially, I offer some definitions for context. Starting with general well-being which is considered a complicated combination of factors relating to a person's physical, mental, emotional, and social health, associated with happiness and life satisfaction (Better Health Channel, 2024). Additionally, are two sub-types of well-being that will be covered throughout this assignment, namely, subjective and objective (Office for National Statistics, 2024; University of Pittsburgh, 2020). Subjective well-being is based on psychological elements, such as directly asking someone about their feelings, opinions, and emotions; and this is unique to each individual (Office for National Statistics, 2024; University of Pittsburgh, 2020). On the other hand, objective well-being focuses on physical elements-reporting facts about people's lives and the environment they live in such as income, food, and housing, impacting on the elements relevant to the wider society (Office for National Statistics, 2024; University of Pittsburgh, 2020).

In Youth Work there is a strong awareness of how wellbeing is linked to levels of resilience in young people. Resilience defined is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences through mental, emotional and behavioural flexibility and adjustment (Hurley, 2024; American Psychological Association, 2025). For example, overcoming Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which are traumatic experiences that occur during a person's childhood that can affect their health and well-being, potentially leading to long-lasting effects into adulthood (Coleman and Hendry, 1999; Hendry and Kloep, 2012).

I now begin the main essay by exploring the social action project that I was involved with.

Theme 1: Social action project

In a conversation with Lock (2023), a colleague, she stated the purpose of the social action project was to reduce the stigma and raise awareness around mental health issues that young people face, and to create safe environments for them to access support (Major, 2024). One example of what the young people were offered during this project was to create online content such as blogs and videos to share their aspirations and worries around mental health (Major, 2024). Research shows that 99% of those in the UK, aged between 16-25, use social media everyday (Youth Sport Trust, 2023). Additionally, one in three young people reported feeling trapped on social media and that one in five young people are shown distressing content online at least once a week (YoungMinds, 2025). Following this, the intention behind young people being in control of creating online content was to hopefully enable social media to become a more positive place for them, given the amount of time young people spend on these platforms. Also, this is an example, of how Article 12 of the UNCRC- “every child has a voice” (Unicef, 2025, np) was upheld throughout this project.

As a trainee youth worker, I feel that it is a duty for all youth workers to uphold this article as it is a way to empower young people to participate. Youth empowerment and participation enables young people to have opportunities to take part, be heard and receive positive changes in whatever way they need it (Action for Children, 2025). Giving young people the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect them, in this case social media, is an example of what participation is all about, and the UNCRC emphasises how human rights apply to all young people and children as much as they do to adults (Action for Children, 2025; Unicef, 2025). Through my experience, I have seen how Youth Work can be life changing for young people when they are given the right to express themselves, have their views considered, and gain the feeling of being more in control of the decisions that affect them (Action for children, 2025). In addition, this is also an example of how the values of

Youth Work were reflected, as empowerment, participative, and expressive are three out of the 5 Pillars of Youth Work (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2022).

Following another conversation with Lock (2023), the aims of this project were confirmed as self-worth, feeling connected and resilience (Major, 2024). Firstly, focusing on self-worth, this is defined as “the feeling that you are a good person who deserves to be treated with respect” (Merriem-Webster, nd, np, cited in Ackerman, 2018). This is often confused with self-esteem which is what we think and feel about ourselves, whereas self-worth is having self-awareness that a person is “greater than all of those things” (Hibbert, 2013 cited in Ackerman, 2018).

An example of how the self-worth of young people was enhanced through this project was when we offered them a pamper session. This was a way for them to participate in self-care and recognise its importance for mental and physical health, as self-care can enhance happiness and life satisfaction (Glowiak, 2024), contributing to their subjective well-being. Whilst any form of pampering is considered self-care, it was also important for the young people to understand that pampering was not the only form of self-care (Jefferson, 2016). For example, I explained that self-care can be as simple as setting personal boundaries, talking kindly about themselves, and setting time aside for their hobbies.

Whilst this pamper session went well it was important to reflect, as Cottrell (2015) explains that by reflecting we are able draw conclusions on what went well and what areas need improvement. Reflecting upon this session, we designed it carefully to ensure it was inclusive, for example by offering unisex facials, and this ensured we upheld another of the 5 Pillars of Youth Work (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2022). The majority of the young people who attended this session were girls, as many boys commented stating that it was a “girl’s thing”. Therefore, looking ahead, if we were to provide young people with a

pamper session again, it would be worth considering having an extra well-being activity alongside the pamper session, to increase the engagement of everyone, given that this project only ran once a week.

Secondly, focusing on feeling connected, an example of how we gave young people the opportunity to feel connected through this project was by enabling them to build a well-being garden (Major, 2024). Recognising that feeling connected with others is one of the 5 ways to well-being (NHS, 2025), and that having positive, healthy relationships can enhance well-being. This is because it can help build self-worth, gain a sense of belonging, share positive experiences with others, and be supported emotionally (NHS, 2025). Additionally, building this garden was another element to improving their well-being, and it meant the young people were constantly outdoors, unless the weather was inclement. Mind (2025) outlines the benefits of being outdoors and surrounded by nature, such as reducing stress and improving physical health. This is also an example, of how the young people stayed active during this project, staying active being another of the 5 ways of well-being (NHS, 2025).

This activity also provided a way for the young people to develop their teamwork skills as they experienced group dynamics as they went through the stages of Tuckman's group theory (1965, cited in Sapin, 2013). Focusing on this theory further, youth workers can recognise that going through these stages would contribute to a young person's psychological safety during the fourth stage of "performing" (Psych Safety, 2022). It is during this stage that all members have trust with each other, feel that their contributions are valued and that their mistakes can be discussed openly (Psych Safety, 2022).

Moreover, psychological safety is one of the levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, cited in Sapin, 2013). Sapin (2013) explains the benefits of a youth worker recognising a young person's needs, as they can provide suited activities and tailored support. In this

instance, the young people were offered the opportunity to create a well-being garden as it was clear that their need was to have a safe space that they would recognise as their own, to connect with others and improve practical skills.

Furthermore, the idea of having a well-being garden is an example of how this is linked to the *Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, specifically the goal of a “A globally responsible Wales” (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2025, np). As a part of their “experiential learning” (Ord, 2016, p. 177), the young people learned about sustainability through creating a greenhouse made from recycled bottles, and used other resources to create wind chimes and dream catchers; they also planted flowers and trees to complete the visual appeal of this environment.

Moving on to the third aim, namely, resilience. Throughout this project, the young people were reminded that they will be supported by us youth workers and to consider this project as their own, which was a key aspect to building relationships with them. As I mentioned above, to enhance well-being, a contributing factor is to be surrounded by positive, healthy relationships (NHS, 2025). To be able to form a positive relationship, it was important that the young people could trust us, and we could trust them as “without trust, there can be no authentic relationship” (Romero *et al.*, 2018, p. 83). By encouraging and supporting young people, this trust was built, enabling them to recognise they could approach any of us youth workers to discuss their concerns, if they had any.

Also, the idea that they could consider this project as their own contributed significantly to providing them with a sense of achievement, belonging and enhancing their resilience.

Furthermore, another example of how I aimed to enhance the resilience of young people is by encouraging them to set realistic and achievable goals (University of California, 2016-17). By having these conversations, this was a way for them to increase their confidence, give them a

purpose to stay motivated, and hopefully boost their work ethic (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 2022).

I also considered it to be important that they recognised that bigger goals may take more time and effort, and that breaking those bigger goals into smaller steps may make things more achievable, and that it is acceptable for their goals to change over time. In being realistic and honest with the young people, I hoped this would help ensure that their trust in me would be more likely to remain secure. Moreover, Jeffs and Smith (2010, p. 5) state how Youth Work is “informal education” and often focuses on personal development. Keeping this in mind, I expressed how these goals do not have to be complicated; they can be as simple as setting an alarm to wake up earlier, or reading an extra chapter from a book.

Furthermore, I provided the young people with mindfulness and relaxation techniques such as the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise (Calm, 2023). The purpose of this method is to distract your thoughts, enabling you to focus on your surroundings rather than focusing on anxiety and negative thoughts (Calm, 2023). Due to my passion for enhancing young people’s well-being and resilience, I consider it important that they are aware of this technique. This is particularly important in situations where they may be alone during a panic/anxiety attack; having the knowledge on how to use this technique would hopefully provide them with the ability to calm themselves down and reduce their anxiety and stress.

Lastly, prior to the project’s launch, a group of young people met with one of the funders to express their reasons as to what the funding would go towards and why it was important to them. As a Youth Work team looking ahead, we identified the potential opportunities and benefits that could occur from this. For example, the funders would get to hear the passions and enthusiasm directly from the young people that would benefit from the funding, potentially increasing the chance of securing funding. Also, having the knowledge that one of

the Youth Work National Occupational Standards Values (NOS) (CLDSCS, 2019, p. 5) is to work in “partnership with young people and others”, recognises that this would be an opportunity for young people to make connections that could lead to future opportunities. As a result, the young people won the funding for this project, enabling their ideas and passions to turn into reality (Major, 2024).

Funding is an example of objective well-being, because it is measured so as to provide resources and develop quality opportunities for young people within Youth Work (Welsh Government (2024). Throughout this project, the funding was monitored by the organisation’s management team; a monthly budget was set to ensure that the money was spread evenly across the year and that the funders knew what their contribution was being spent on (Hoggarth, 2009). Following this, I will now share examples on how this project was monitored, starting with feedback. After every session, I requested feedback from young people, verbally or written, whichever was their preferred. Ingram and Harris (2001, p. 100) explain the “power of feedback” when considering the three forms of feedback- positive, negative, and constructive. We gained constructive feedback which was very effective as it enabled us to know what the young people thought was going well, what could be improved, and what they would like to see, ensuring that our aim for boosting their well-being and resilience was being met.

Furthermore, with the young people’s consent, photographs were taken and sent to the funders. This was done so that the funders could see what the young people had achieved, and the progress made. Additionally, these funders had visited the organisation, having open conversations with the young people and to see in person what the young people had created, for instance the well-being garden. My previous conversations with the funders had always been encouraging, and as a result this project was offered another year of funding due the positive impacts it had on young people’s well-being and resilience. Although this was a

wonderful outcome, it would have been great to see what could have been achieved if this extra funding was available at the start of the project, for example it may have meant being able to run the project more than once a week. Also, this project was aimed at young people aged 14-18, therefore for the future, if possible, I would want considerations made for a mental health project for those who are younger and older.

Theme 2: one-to-one session with a young person

This section will focus on a session I created based on the needs of a young person during my placement at a school. A benefit of Youth Work is its collaboration with other practitioners and organisations when sharing the same goal (CWVYS, 2014). For example, I have previously worked with counsellors, the police and substance misuse teams. In this case, I had worked with a school as our goals in common were to support student development, promote their well-being and enhance their resilience. To protect this young person's identity, I will provide a false name, Alex. For context, to plan and create this session, I had received Alex's profile which articulated the reasons for his referral with additional information regarding his background and interests. Upon reading his profile, I acknowledged that Alex had a lot of anger towards the world, therefore I made the decision to base this session on anger and emotions, as I felt that it was a clear need (Major, 2025).

I decided to use a person-centred approach and took time when choosing the most suitable activity for Alex, as even though I wanted it to be fun, equally I wanted it to benefit his needs (Molinari, 2023; Youth AOD Toolbox, 2025). From my Youth Work experience, I have noticed how the engagement of a young person is enhanced when a session is youth focused, emphasising the importance of why taking his interests into consideration and adapting it to an activity was essential (Nalc, 2025). Moreover, I acknowledged that Alex may be at the

fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory (Cherry, 2023; McLeod, 2024) given that this stage occurs during adolescence between the ages of 12-18. This was another important aspect when deciding the most suitable activity, as it is during this stage where adolescents experience identity and role confusion (Cherry, 2023; McLeod, 2024). Having this knowledge, my hope was that if Alex engaged with an activity that aligned with his interests, it would become more meaningful and reduce any confusion, enhance his identity, and contribute to his overall well-being.

At the beginning, to provide Alex with reassurance, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the session. I had not met Alex before, so by doing this it allowed him to understand what to expect, the potential benefits he could receive, and hopefully make him feel more comfortable as we got to know each other. To reflect the values of Youth Work, I also explained that his participation was voluntary and under no circumstances was he forced to stay for this session should he not want to (CLDSCS, 2019; Major, 2025). My chosen activities for the session were based on Doctor Who, as this was a programme that Alex loved to watch.

The implementation of Doctor Who was a key aspect on how I built a relationship with him (Major, 2024). For example, I asked him "who is your favourite doctor?" and "What is your favourite Doctor Who episode?" Cohen (2022, np) suggests the power of "improvised conversations" alongside the impact that it has occurring naturally, can become help it to become meaningful to the young person, and this was clear to see with how his body language changed. Cellasio (2023) explains how the benefits of recognising another person's body language allows us to respond appropriately, both in relation to gaining an insight into their emotions and the support we provide. At the start of the session, Alex had slow body movements and sat further away from the desk. As a trainee Youth Worker, through my years of experience and training, observing a young person's body language has also enabled me to

reflect on my own body language. For example, Alex's body language indicated that I should be careful with my approach, respect and be mindful of his personal space and boundaries.

Furthermore, having these conversations about Doctor Who is an example of how I used my "problem-solving" (Armstrong, 2012, p.288) skills, which is a key skill when working with young people. This is because Strotter (2025) suggests that using problem-solving skills is not just about responding to and fixing the issues in our environment, but it is also an opportunity to think of creative ways to change our environment, giving us some control over what happens in the future. In this instance, I acknowledged that Alex needed something to spark his interests to want to participate and engage in this activity, to enhance his well-being and resilience (Race, 1993 cited in Brook, 2018; Major, 2025).

As previously mentioned, this session was based on anger and emotions, however, I also wanted it to help improve Alex's emotional well-being and resilience. This led to me being inspired by the anger and anxiety thermometer (Mental Health Center Kids, 2025) as these worksheets included visual communication tools, such as pictures, symbols and fewer words, making them more visually appealing (Major, 2025). This was important to consider as Alex has additional learning needs, so the use of visual communication tools had the power of improving his understanding and ability to communicate (UF Health, 2025), an example of how I upheld another of the Youth Work NOS values, namely "Equity, diversity and inclusion" (CLDSCS, 2019, p.5). Youth workers promote respect to all young people no matter what their background or differences are (CLDSCS, 2019), particularly when it comes to enhancing their well-being and resilience.

The first activity was based on the anger thermometer (Mental Health Center Kids, 2025), with the image of this showing the different stages of anger. For example, the bottom is where he would be calm, the middle is agitated, and the top is the peak of anger. I kept this

concept the same, however, I adapted it to his interests by using a photo of screwdriver rather than a thermometer and called it a ‘sonic screwdriver thermometer’ (Major, 2025). The purpose of this was for me to gain an insight into how Alex expressed his emotions, including what his triggers are and how he responds. The use of visual communication tools made it easier for me to understand, as Alex was able to show me with the pictures and symbols rather than explain it verbally. As a result, I was able to provide Alex with suitable coping mechanisms he could try. This was very effective as not only did this keep him interested, but it was also a way towards enhancing his resilience, upholding the “A resilient Wales” goal of the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2025, np). This is because my intention of having these discussions around healthy coping mechanisms will hopefully support his emotional development and result in positive outcomes for him in the future (NSPCC Learning, 2021).

The second activity I introduced was based on the anxiety thermometer (Mental Health Center Kids, 2025). We followed this same concept because he engaged well with the first activity, thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was still beneficial for his learning. The last activity, I was inspired by a worry jar (Radniecki, 2024) as Alex’s profile mentioned that he suffers with anxiety, this was also something I noticed as the session progressed as he spoke about a lot about his worries. This gave me the understanding that Alex found this to be a safe space; an environment where a person can freely share their thoughts, concerns, and emotions without the fear of being judged or discriminated against (The Wolfpack Project, 2024). As a trainee youth worker, when I provide young people with these safe spaces, I encourage them to be open and express their emotions, giving them the feeling of having a sense of belonging in society. When young people feel supported, there is a higher chance that they will talk about their feelings and ask for help, a way to improve their well-being, mental health, and overall, contribute positively to their development (The Wolfpack Project, 2024; Read,

2025). Within Youth Work, providing young people with safe spaces is more than just a physical location, it is a way of thinking that acknowledges a young person's needs, to provide compassion and empathy (The Wolfpack Project, 2024). As a result, young people can feel recognised, understand that they are not alone and feel supported for their own well-being (The Wolfpack Project, 2024; Read 2025).

To adapt to his interests, keeping the element of Doctor Who, I called this a 'Worry Tardis' (Major, 2025). This concept was similar to the worry jar, however, rather than writing his worries onto a piece of paper and placing them into a jar, Alex wrote them around a picture of a Tardis, imagining that he was sending those worries off into space (Major, 2025). Youth workers often have the skill of being creative with their activities, which can have a positive effect on the outcomes relating to a young person's well-being, particularly when it comes to subjective well-being, positive mood and reducing anxiety or stress (Scherer, 2024). As shown in the example above, I adapted the activity in a creative way with a Doctor Who twist, which helped to create a relaxing environment, enabling Alex to express and connect with his emotions, showing him that I care.

This session was successful in that Alex had learnt coping mechanisms and was excited to come back for another session. It was important for me to be open-minded as I prepared for this session as it was clear from his profile that Alex was vulnerable due to his background and the environment he had been in, potentially resulting in impacts relating to his objective well-being. For example, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Guy-Evans, 2024) suggests that a child's development is influenced by their environment. Therefore, I was considerate about these wider factors to be able to gain a deeper understanding of Alex's needs and well-being (Carter and Cecily, nd). I also recognised that my role as a trainee youth worker was not only about building positive, trusted relationships with young people, but also providing them with protective factors (EWC, 2025). For example, we may not be able to

prevent adversities occurring in the lives of young people but as a protective factor, we can provide them with “positive childhood experiences” (Pinetree Institute, np 2025), such as enabling them to talk about their feelings, offer opportunities to participate with the community, and feel safe with an adult (Pinetree Institute, 2025).

After learning about well-being and resilience and reflecting on this session, I would use these activities again, provided they are appropriate to the circumstances and needs of the young person being supported. A benefit of these activities is that they can be easily adapted to a young person’s interests, but I would consider providing a physical object rather than writing around a piece of paper, particularly for the Worry Tardis. For Alex, having a physical ‘Tardis’ may have been more beneficial as the activity would have been an interactive ‘doing’ activity rather than a writing task. Also, going forward, when the funding is next reviewed, I would want considerations to be made for the high demand of school-based youth workers. This is because we were at this school once a fortnight for two hours, and as a result there is a significant number of young people on the waiting list.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay explored Youth Work theory, as well as drawing on my own experiences in various placements across south-west Wales, illustrating and analysing the potential for Youth Work practice to enhance resilience and well-being among young people. To begin, the essay explored a social action project that I was involved with. This project focussed on young people’s mental health, wellbeing, and the associated stigmas. It was found that well-being, and resilience can be enhanced through providing young people with appropriate quality experiential learning opportunities in a familiar setting, to positively support their emotional growth and development. Implementing self-care (pampering

session) and opportunities to experience activities outdoors (well-being garden), were just two examples of how innovative Youth Work practice can promote positive mental health in young people.

Secondly, it examined a one-to-one activity session based around a young person's needs, and undertaken during a school-based placement. This supported the reality that youth workers do not only work with groups of young people, but they can also provide individual tailored support in creative ways to effect change and aid the emotional development of young people. In this instance the one-to-one, Doctor Who themed, session demonstrated how effective one-to-one Youth Work can be when collaborating with other services (in this case, the school) or practitioners (teachers) who share the same goal. When this happens, the support to the young person becomes much stronger and more effective.

Both examples above have aspects in common when it comes to a young person's well-being and resilience. They include providing young people with a voice, their choice on how or if they want to participate, being surrounded by a positive environment and the importance of building healthy relationships with others. These are examples of the values of Youth Work and as a result, youth workers are seen as a protective factor in relation to the adversities that young people face. The support and encouragement provided by youth workers are a solution for young people to be heard and provide them with a sense of belonging, which is a necessity for their emotional development.

Lastly, the aim of enhancing young people's well-being and resilience is a process that requires constant evaluation by youth workers, in order to ensure that it is an aim that is being met. There are challenges such as funding constraints, societal pressures (particularly from social media), and the high demand need for more school-based youth workers. However, youth workers always aim to find a way to ensure that young people are prioritised to receive

support in whatever way they need it. Therefore, by aiming to enhance young people's well-being and resilience, youth workers can have a long-lasting impact, empowering young people to aim towards positive futures where they can face challenges with confidence. Therefore, one of the most important factors within Youth Work is the dedication that youth workers have, and the role that they play, when promoting well-being and fostering the resilience of young people.

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