

# Youth services – the first public service to go

Government spending cuts are tearing youth services apart. All over the UK and Ireland the axe has been falling hard on community services supporting young people.

The speed and scale of the cuts is shocking. There is a very real danger that these will be the first public services to go, possibly within the next 6 months.

Young people have been hit disproportionately hard by this government's cuts programme. Student tuition fees are to rise, the education maintenance allowance (EMA) has been axed, the Future Jobs Fund dismantled. Priced out of education as the economy falters and youth unemployment escalates, today's young people are fast becoming the jilted generation.

Over one million 16-24 year olds are now unemployed, the highest figure since 1992.

Over 80 per cent of voluntary organisations' providing youth services have said targeted programmes for young people will have to be pulled.

7,000 professionally qualified youth workers, work with 30,000 trained youth support workers, providing support, training and encouragement to over 500,000 volunteers in an organised environment.

The government has cut council funding by 28 per cent over four years. Many councils plan to get rid of their youth services altogether after the Treasury cuts a number of vital central funding streams and grants, including the Youth Opportunity Fund, Youth Capital Fund, a 12 per cent cut to Education department's non-school budget and the removal of ring-fenced budgets devolved to local authorities.

## **Cuts to youth services will hurt future generations of young people**

Funding once earmarked for young people's services will be siphoned off to support other local priorities. 95 per cent of the heads of local authorities polled, said that their budget for providing services to young people in their area will see big cuts.

National government says that local authorities could choose not to cut youth services. Local government blames national government for not giving it enough funds. Caught in the middle are millions of young people.

But it is not just council run projects that are risk; many voluntary and charitable-led organisations also face severe funding cuts. 70 per cent of funding for the voluntary sector, particularly for youth services, comes from local authorities.

Youth services is the 'Big Society' in action, but the government's cut's agenda will starve voluntary-led organisations of funding. It may be that private, profit-making companies fill the gap but this is the end of universal, publically-funded young people's services.

## **Government's alternative – a poorer solution, a false economy**

The government plans to replace the professional, 365 day- a -year youth service with short-term summer projects. The National Citizens Service (NCS), a privately-run scheme, will be more costly to run and offer young people far less.

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Uncertainty over its structure, purpose and full cost remains; some argue that the NCS could cost upwards of £800million, based on current funding of the pilot schemes, and doubts have been raised as to their effectiveness, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The government's scheme offers society far less than the £300million spent on the current 365 day-a-year youth service.

### **Youth services save society money**

For over fifty years, youth work has provided the most cost effective way of reaching and supporting young people. Every £1 invested in youth work generates £8 worth of voluntary activity. Youth workers are trained to raise funds to support their work.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a project providing a full range of services and in contact with 125 young people a week would cost £75,000 a year, or £16 for each contact.

Youth work is cost-effective. For instance, a child with a conduct disorder at age 10 will cost the public purse around £70,000 by age 28. An Audit Commission report into preventing anti-social behaviour by young people estimates that a young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the age of 16, but one who is given support to stay out costs less than £50,000.

### **Other comparative costs include:**

- £1,300 per person for an electronically monitored curfew order
- around £35,000 per year to keep one young person in a young offender institution
- and around £9,000 for the average resettlement package per young person after custody.

And every NEET (Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) costs around £97,000 over their lifetime, rising in excess of £300,000 depending on the benefits they claim.

Against these, £350 per year, per young person would be a small price to pay to unlock the rich benefit of community-based provision for all young people.

## **Time to Act – help save youth services**

**Lobby your local councillor** (see the guidance note)

**Lobby your MP** (see guidance note)

**Write to the Minister, Eric Pickles**, and tell him to stop the cuts c/o Department for Communities & local government, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU or [picklese@parliament.uk](mailto:picklese@parliament.uk)

**And March for the Alternative – 26 March 2011, London.** Everyone welcome.

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Please refer to the Don't Break Britain Campaigning toolkit for further information on how to plan, implement and win local campaigns.

