



youth work

through the
Youth or Adult?
Initiative

The **YOUTH OR ADULT?** Initiative

Youth or Adult? began 21 years ago, from a simple idea: to develop youth work by supporting individuals to train professionally, while working in community-based organisations.

We believe that investment in people creates a lasting impact within communities. Through Youth or Adult? local voluntary sector agencies get five years funding for a full-time worker, plus various project costs. The Initiative supports the professional development of those workers, up to degree standard, through a partnership with the YMCA George Williams College.

With Youth or Adult? – and the additional funding streams that have grown organically around it – we have established a consistent pattern of support for individuals and agencies. The Initiative is UK-wide and supports a network of projects that includes churches, youth cafés, creative arts projects, street work, volunteering initiatives, outdoor education, building projects and a farm.

Throughout the 21 years we have sought to put our values into action. As funders, we have tried to ensure that our way of working with the individuals and agencies we support is consistent with the relationship-based style of youth work that we advocate. We ‘journey together’ along a path of learning, with the individuals, their agencies and the College.

It is difficult; it is challenging. But it works. The evidence is in the impact on the individuals and agencies in whom we invest – and in their influence on the young people and communities with whom they engage.

Charlie Harris & Chris Dunning
Directors of Youth Projects, The Rank Foundation



trust

in young people

Youth or Adult? is founded on the belief that there is good in all. The job of the youth worker is to reach out to that goodness in young people and to create environments where it can grow and be expressed. This faith is the only starting point that makes change possible. We believe that:

- **Young people are members of communities – now, not at some point in the future.**
- **Their voices must be heard, for the benefit of all.**
- **There are leaders in the making amongst them.**

Taking a step towards young people, demonstrating trust, is the essential starting point. By valuing them – and acknowledging their rights and responsibilities – we begin to involve them in community concerns. Engaging with young people as valuable contributors to their communities offers them an opportunity – and a challenge.

“

**what are we, if we
are not members
of this community?**

”



“ treat young people as individuals”

Listening to young people is a practical way of demonstrating that they are valued. For many of the young people with whom we work, this is a new experience. Challenging young people to be involved encourages them to accept responsibility and use their voice; it enables their transition from youth into adulthood. That engagement can only be achieved by individuals spending time with young people, building trust.





Rank encourages project workers to 'see the spark' in young people – to seek out the potential leaders within communities. Many of the Youth or Adult? trainees grew up in the communities in which they work. They were often 'users' or 'members' of the projects where they are based for their training. The first step – becoming a project volunteer – can be facilitated through Rank's Gap Scheme [see back page for more information].

“

**discovering
the potential**
”



the **essence** of youth work

Over 21 years, we have built a clearer understanding of the 'essence' of youth work. For us youth work is, at heart, about relationship and association – connecting and being with others – and the good that can flow from this. Youth work involves:

- **Facilitating relationships that allow young people to grow and flourish.**
- **Creating spaces with the chance to reflect, learn and grow.**
- **Enabling opportunities to join together to organize and take part in groups and activities.**



“ walk with them... work with them, alongside them ”

Youth work offers young people the chance to appreciate and deepen their relationship with:

- themselves;
- others;
- the world; and
- the transcendental.

Workers within the Youth or Adult? Initiative devote a lot of energy to making contact with individuals and groups, spending time with them, and in being there for them. The way they are with young people, and the fact that young people choose to be around them, allows workers to ask questions and to encourage others to be hopeful and open to relationship.

The best youth work projects offer young people the choice and the chance to get away from the daily pressures of home, school, and neighbourhood. They offer sanctuary: a place to 'be themselves'. They give room for young people to reflect on their lives and what is going on around them. Young people are invited to explore, learn and work at making things better. A safe and trusting environment allows people the freedom for:

- Sharing
- Fellowship
- Relationships
- Fun
- Risk



“

**a place of safety...
a place of acceptance**”



Youth work offers opportunities to try new things – opportunities for those who may not otherwise get them. It might be as simple as a chance for young people to talk about things that concern them – or it could be a once-in-a-lifetime voyage on a tall ship. Projects encourage young people to join with others, and to make things happen themselves. They take responsibility, make decisions together and get things done. The work takes place naturally, in young people's social groups, rather than with individual 'cases'.

“

to achieve with young people something that they wanted....

to make it theirs

”



pebbles in the pond

The Rank Foundation looks to individuals and agencies involved in the Youth or Adult? Initiative to be 'pebbles in the pond' – to have a growing influence on their communities. In practice, this involves acting within local networks, collaborating with, and being examples to, other groups and agencies. This funding strategy has spread its influence through:

- **Growing our own workers and leaders.**
- **Developing ambition as individuals and organisations.**
- **Changing our communities.**



“ spread the seed...
grow the culture...”

Through Youth or Adult? agencies are able to nurture and develop local people as workers and leaders in their communities. The development of local leadership encourages consistency and long-term sustainability. With their shared roots, the workers become powerful role models for the young people with whom they work.

The Rank Foundation and the YMCA George Williams College have worked together with local agencies to build new forms of support and training.



“I meet new
cultures...
extend
myself”

Consistently, the support of Rank gives agencies greater confidence, enabling them to expand their influence and make a difference. As a direct result of participating in the Youth or Adult? Initiative, many agencies develop new areas of work and make new links with other organizations. In part, this is because of the resources and expertise they can draw upon from within the Rank network.

Growth also flows from workers' and managers' ability to innovate and draw in resources and partners from outside. The investment made by the Rank Foundation and Joseph Rank Trust acts as a 'kitemark' – an indication of the quality of the work – and can be used to unlock investment from others.

Youth or Adult? projects are based in, or linked to, local organizations, including churches and community groups. This generates community interest in work with young people, and encourages local people to look at other aspects of neighbourhood life. Work with young people often draws in and involves other family members.

Workers involved in the Youth or Adult? Initiative also invite and support young people to make changes in their communities – and further afield. The networks that are created contribute to the general well-being of the communities and neighbourhoods where the work is taking place.



“
**journeying
with others**
”



the learning **challenge**

It takes special kinds of people

to work well in this way with young people. They need to be flexible, open and to know themselves. They must be seen as having integrity and character, and as having a heart for young people. The Foundation encourages local agencies to identify people with these qualities. It then provides them with the space, relationships and opportunities to develop over five years. Experience has shown that this learning process involves:

- **a struggle towards personal growth and self awareness**
- **learning relevant to their role as workers**
- **achieving wider recognition**

If workers do not know themselves, it is difficult for them to appreciate what might be happening for others. Similarly, if they do not value growth and change in themselves, it is hard to see how they can encourage and facilitate it in others. In making relationships we need to understand how we are experienced by others. The programme of education associated with the Initiative encourages and supports workers to look at themselves, and to grow as people.



“ a **five year**
journey of **discovery** ”



““ being reflective... being passionate... being true...””

Throughout the five years that workers are with the Initiative they are in training; they are also working within communities. All worker/trainees are encouraged to reflect on what they are doing, and to develop their work and that of their agency. Each has a non-managerial supervisor who they meet regularly to explore their practice; they take part in Rank network events; and they study with the YMCA George Williams College. The emphasis throughout is upon extending and deepening the work as it is happening.





Workers develop considerably over their five years within the Initiative. The work changes – and so do they. The way others see them alters, too. Their contribution is recognized more and more – something that is also aided by gaining professional qualification and a degree. This recognition, in turn, opens doors. In particular, it can often create new opportunities for the project and young people.

“
that piece
of paper
means the
world
to me
”



what makes it **work?**

Over 21 years some 200 agencies have hosted a Youth or Adult? project. Tens of thousands of young people have benefited from the involvement of Youth or Adult? workers – and through support from the other funding strands that have grown around it.

Within Youth or Adult? alone, around 125 workers have qualified as professional workers, another 45 are currently undergoing training to degree level. Through The Rank Foundation's wider funding programme a further 80 have achieved recognised qualifications and 900 volunteer leaders have been grown.

The result is a body of innovatory, local work with young people. Alongside this, there has been significant development, both in the size and shape of the organizations involved and the depth and range of work they are undertaking.

The roots of the success of Youth or Adult? are in the underlying values of the Initiative – and the way they are put into practice.

Youth or Adult? is effective because it:

Starts – and stays – with local agencies and locally-identified needs.

Youth or Adult? looks to local people to identify needs and to design 'youth-friendly' projects that address them. This creates a stronger local investment in the project and local relevance to its work. The work also has a more appropriate focus and greater flexibility.

Looks to long-term investment.

The Rank Charities have focused on investment – on providing agencies with the right resources to grow the work. In doing this they have looked to the long-term (five years). There has not been pressure to demonstrate short-term gains, but rather to develop work that has quality, substance and sustainability. The five years form a foundation, which – experience has shown – is the basis for significant long-term change and development.

Places reflection and professional development at its core.

The partnership with the YMCA George Williams College is vital to the impact and sustainability of the Initiative. The College places reflection at the heart of professional development. This has stimulated a culture of exploration across Rank's youth work network. By working with the College to build a progressive framework of professional development –

from Foundation Studies to degree – the Charities have facilitated the growth of high quality local work and a cadre of skilled professionals.

Encourages agencies and individuals to be 'pebbles in the pond'.

The Charities are keen to create environments where able and knowledgeable workers and managers can flourish and 'make ripples'. There is a strong emphasis on sharing across the Rank network. The underlying philosophy is that significant and lasting changes in the field come about, in large part, through direct engagement with good youth work and skilled practitioners – and the ongoing contact within local communities.

Operates on a human scale.

The Charities recognize that relationships are central to all aspects of the work and, thus, look to a facilitative relationship between all partners. There is an emphasis on dialogue. As a result, there is much more personal contact, for example, between the funders and agencies than is the case with many other initiatives. This 'organic' approach takes into account the reality that projects evolve differently and flexibility is needed.

A future publication will explore the 21 years of learning from the Youth or Adult? Initiative in depth.



“

**you've got to
keep going”**

21 years of Youth or Adult?

have shown that trust in young people – and in the people and agencies who work with them – pays off in the long term. The workers trained through the Initiative are skilled for life. And their passion inspires and influences future generations. For many, the learning and the experience of being valued is what they ‘pass on’ to the young people with whom they work.

Rank Youth Work

Youth or Adult? is now part of a wider Rank Foundation funding programme. All of the strands share a common philosophy and approach. The main youth work programmes are:

The Gap Scheme and Rank Volunteer Award

The Gap Scheme offers potential young leaders, the chance to undertake full-time volunteer youth work placements in Rank-funded initiatives, with training as an integral part of the experience. Participation automatically entails enrolment in the Rank Volunteer Award.

The Skills Apprenticeship Scheme

This initiative combines training in informal education with experience and qualification in a range of disciplines. It is funded initially over three years for agencies within and beyond the Rank Network.

Youth or Adult? Initiative

A five-year initiative combining on-the-job training and development of workers, communities and youth work projects in the independent, voluntary sector. Training is provided by the YMCA George Williams College Distance Learning.

Investing in Success

This initiative funds existing or recent network agencies for a further investment, so that they may

undertake special projects, developing their work, using the 'pebble in the pond' approach..

Key workers

Support for qualified and experienced workers to develop similar strategies within an organisation known to the Foundation, often as a managerial post.

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Visit: **www.rankyouthwork.org** **www.rankfoundation.com**
www.ranktrust.org

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 **The Rank Foundation**
a pebble in the pond