

A YOUTH POLICY CONVERSATION

“With a strong equity perspective and a commitment to partnerships that support the more vulnerable”

Anglicare WA and Commission for Children Workshop

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WHAT IS NEEDED AT A YOUTH POLICY LEVEL

“Learning from the UK Experience”

“How can a youth policy and a subsequent strategy for resource allocation and program design, support our efforts to raise the aspirations of Freedom’s Orphans”?

1. A youth policy that makes resource allocation and all programs (including education and training) accountable to a shared vision – a holistic vision about young people which is broader than economic well being and education/skills attainment. The UK youth policy is a set of five goals (Every child Matters).
 - 1) Be healthy
 - 2) Stay safe
 - 3) Enjoy and achieve
 - 4) Make a positive contribution
 - 5) Economic well being
2. A youth strategy that provides a framework for how communities can go about their business. In the UK this is a 10 year strategy called Aiming Higher which has three key strands.
 - 1) Empowerment – young people have a say
 - 2) Access and Inclusion – most at risk
 - 3) Workforce Development – integration of services and “pd”
3. Evolving strategic planning to the regional or local level that expects all partners to come together and determine priorities, targets (based upon indicators that relate to the policy goals) and the processes of partnership that underpin delivery (UK – Local Strategic Partnership 14-19).
4. Can we debate the UK framework, reject it or leapfrog upon their learning’s? Can their quiet revolution (devolve resources to partnerships rather than single agencies) be amplified and put on fast forward, or do we need to experience stage 1. For example, can schools be inspected on how partnership friendly they have become?
5. Resources for developing the role of the “reliable adult” for the most at risk; an individual who works alongside the case manager and provides continuity. For many at risk young people who are participating in programs at school or through the “National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions”, the reliable adult maybe the employer, work supervisor or co-worker who supports the work related learning of the young person. One concerted effort at national, regional and local level in full cooperation with employer groups and the trade union movement can raise the profile of the significant adult in the transition of at risk young people.
6. Consideration of young people becoming a partner as well as the recipient of transition support. The empowerment of young people is central to the development, review and evaluation of youth services in the UK (but practical action must acknowledge stages of child and adolescent development)
7. Full consideration be given to the three key strands of work recommended earlier which will mean that funding equally rewards outcomes relevant to each strand and recognises individual and collective achievements.
8. An international scoping exercise on youth policy/strategy be undertaken, with a focus on how national responses incorporate the needs of the “most at risk”. The UK is but one response.

FREEDOM'S ORPHANS – THE TERM

“Orphaned by autonomy, neglect, breakdown of support, and poverty”

1995 Freedom's Children (Demos)

- Dominance of autonomy and authenticity over authority and tradition – licence to choose direction.
- Breaking down of certainty and continuity in family, community and world of work.
- Emphasis on the individual to decide and create pathways – to be the informed self-starter/purchaser.
- Lack of parameters and collective support (unions and teams).

2006 Freedom's Orphans (IPPR)

- Freedom and flexibility left “the poor, at risk and neglected bewildered and confused”.
- Floundering as they seek to create rather than test/challenge limits, guidance and protection/security.
- The responsabilisation of the child (not only the poor) – a possible “values vacuum”.
- Traumatic routes of transition from child to adolescence to adulthood.
- Importance of generic skills and structured activity.

2008 Freedom's Orphans (Tubbs – USA)

- The child is vulnerable, impressionable and needs boundaries.
- Devotion to individual liberty – freedom defined as unhindered choice demanding judgement and risk calculation (does this correlate to stages in brain development?).
- Public policy committed to “rights of the child” but not paid enough attention to the duties of the adult.

Y GENERATION – AN EQUITY PERSPECTIVE

Prevailing Analysis (Y Generation)

1. Keeping Options Open – thriving on flexibility and relative freedom/autonomy.
2. Balance Career and Lifestyle – determining own way; a self-starter/decision maker; seeking career development plans/coaching.
3. Determining Own Values – reviewing and questioning adult and parents traditional ways of thinking, doing, planning.
4. Respecting the Relationship not the Position – not accepting authority without asking why? Wanting a say, valuing authenticity and room to use initiative.
5. Peers a Precious Resource – although well connected to other support.
6. Lateral Learners and IT skilled.
7. Delaying traditional symbols of adulthood.

Equity Perspective (Freedoms Orphans)

1. Limited Options – no clear way forward; struggle with being the self-starter.
2. Floundering, needs attachment, structure and security (the reliable adult) World of Work often means low pay and skill acquisition and little continuity.
3. Values identity formed in a vacuum; past neglect and access to a responsible adult a problem. Can exhibit a “hard edge”.
4. Distrustful of parents and authority, not having respectful and nurturing relationships with adults – yet open to manipulation from promises of the quick-fix; needing continual affirmation and immediate recognition.
5. Peers may be only connection (not custodial) but can be destructive/damaged influence as well as “gang” survival.
6. Limited access to IT and/or reactive/receivers rather than creators of information flows and learning.
7. Symbols sees as out of reach (a distant dream) or irrelevant.

STRENGTHS OF FREEDOM'S ORPHANS

“Presenting opportunities for providing support”

- Appreciative when they are connected to a reliable source of support.
- When supported, they can reveal remarkable levels of determination/patience – yet “one step forward, three steps back” when crisis hits (resilience!!).
- Can be passionate and ready to jump on board of a new way or movement (potential for exploitation).
- May respond to a group challenge/goal and cherish “belonging” and solidarity.
- May be bright, and not able to reconcile their hopes and awareness with harsh realities (mental illness).
- All the energy and exploration of adolescence and needing to grow in transition.

“These strengths reveal associated vulnerabilities, and care must always be taken to avoid control and exploitation”.

LIMITATIONS/WARNING SIGNALS OF THE TERM

- Freedom's Orphans may have a strong equity perspective, yet it is a generalisation like Y Generation.
- The term can come across as a "series of judgements" about young people who are seen as being at risk – it is vital to acknowledge their strengths and to fully understand the changes in society that have led to this term and thinking.
- The irony of the term; a significant percentage of these young people have experienced a custodial culture – remand centres, forceful exploitation and abuse by family or guardians yet still a lack of handing down traditions with care and love that assist values development, career planning and social engagement.
- Do not assume a "classist" analysis; so many of the poor are not "Freedom's Orphans" and some of the "rich" are floundering – responsabilisation of the child; lack of parental engagement.

RAISING ASPIRATIONS – THE TERM

- Aspirations means strong wishes, desires; a will to succeed and achieve, ambitions, hopes and dreams.
- In the UK, the term has re-emerged in response to concerns that investing in schools alone has not raised attainment for the “at risk” and/or that the attainment gap between the poor and the rest has not been narrowed. To raise attainment requires the raising of aspirations. Then social mobility can be strengthened.
- Raising aspirations can only be achieved by partnerships between schools (or a dominant and primary source of learning and care) and parents/caregivers, youth services and community (employers; NGOs etc). Minister of State for Education (UK) – Schools Can’t do it Alone.
- The primary partner should build the capacity of their partners to support young people.
- The Quiet Revolution (UK) is about building, resourcing and sustaining partnerships – a policy direction that has evolved beyond the initial focus of investing purely in schools. “It Takes a Village to Educate the Child”.
- Raising Aspirations is about broadening horizons, exposing young people to possibilities and it is about developing self-esteem, connections and confidence to have a “can do” attitude. It is about both “bonding” and bridging.
- Emphasis is on partnership promotion in low SES communities and in “coasting” schools with a significant minority “at risk” (the gap is large).

LIMITATIONS/WARNING SIGNALS FOR THE TERM

RAISING ASPIRATIONS

- Raising Aspirations contains a number of value assumptions; based upon class perceptions and values. There is always some danger in professionals deciding that the client needs to become “more like them”. Can you/should you inculcate values??
- The term has placed almost total priority on improving the learning and economic outcomes of the poor, deprived and excluded. To live a life that is based upon “claim, cheat and survive” is not good enough. However the term also has resonance and relevance to raising the social and ethical attainments of the poor and those travelling well. Is “to claim, cheat and thrive” good enough? Aspirations regarding valuing oneself and others, contributing to the common good have a direct connection to realising the goals of schools (Melbourne Declaration of Goals).
- There are dangers and challenges in pushing high aspirations (from the high expectations of parents/caregivers) with low achievement. Thanks to Brenda Cherednichenko (Edith Cowan University).

CONNECTING THE CONCEPTS

“Raising the Aspirations of Freedom’s Orphans”

Seeking to make the distinction between expectations of others and the aspirations of young people; the following aspirations of Freedom’s Orphans are listed below

- Want opportunities and options to be accessible, even made available; both in an economic and social sense
- Seek attachment, structure, security and care from a reliable source – love and some sense of permanence regarding a safe and secure place to be
- On the search for something to believe in, to follow, a reason for living and moving forward
- Looking out for a reliable and trustworthy source of power – a solution, an answer, a patron (even though they often have a distrust of authority)
- To belong; to escape loneliness and fear – peers that they can share with and rely upon
- To receive immediate acknowledgement, affirmation, rewards and the experience of success.

Our Expectation – can we enable these young people to connect with sources of support that are reliable, caring yet empowering – accepting attachment and then reducing unhealthy dependence upon substances, institutions, exploitative gangs and even in the longer term professional workers.

HOW DO/CAN WE RESPOND

“Three equally important strands working together”

1. Case Management

- The approachable professional who builds a relationship, facilitates sensitive referral and accesses the young person to resources and opportunities – accepting initial attachment and then reducing dependency.
- The worker who can make the distinction between their expectations and the young persons aspirations and integrate **both** (balance autonomy and handing down of tradition).

2. Capacity Building

- The organisation that acknowledges that the primary partner cannot do it alone – priority on developing the significant adult and peer support.
- Building the capacity of parents/caregivers, professionals, significant adults (including employers) and peers to support the young person – the 4 pillars!
- Inter-agency collaboration and partnerships that are sustainable.
- Strengthening the voice of young people – they are a partner also.

3. Activity

- A vital complement to the “dialogue and referral” of case management (1:1).
- Fun, team based (group) and developing the skills of resilience, initiative and interdependency.
- Bonding and bridging.
- Incremental approach to young people’s leadership.
- Can be shaped to encourage rites of passage, initiation and the handing down of tradition, plus cherish the emerging adult.

“Strengthening and Tapping the 4 Pillars of Career and Transition (broadest sense) Support”.

THE 4 PILLARS

“Schools, and Youth Services, teachers, youth workers and case managers cannot do it alone”

1. Parents/Caregivers

- Particularly in early stages of adolescence – build their skills/capacity
- Cluster of agencies creates an economy of scale for specialised competence and networks
- Acknowledge extended family/neighbourhood and significant adult in latter teenage years

2. Professionals

- Accept attachment and then empower
- Refer/use specialist services (health, welfare etc) and key life skills, conflict resolution/anger management
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Shared goals and structured review of partnering (cross-sector pd)
- Local/regional strategic partnership forum; decide priorities, rules of engagement, targets

3. Community and Significant Adults

- Continuity, reliability and trusting adults – role models and coaches that may evolve into mentors
- Work with employers, placement supervisors, trade unionists and community volunteers to build a network

4. Peers

- Activity (adventure) strand designed to build the team and facilitate peer support (use of the arts, sport, music/poetry, hobbies)
- Progression from structured adult led – young person led; progression in skill development (reflect stages of child/adolescent development)
- Broaden horizons – settings, opportunities and a way from the comfort zone (gradually)
- Reinforce connections to the other 3 pillars

LOW SES SCHOOLS – PARTNERSHIP IS CORE BUSINESS (UK)

- Starts with the Youth Policy and Youth Matters/Aiming High – 10 year youth strategy.
- Starts with the premise that schools can't do it alone – need to challenge the barriers to learning and many of them are generated beyond the classroom.
- Need to raise aspirations to raise attainment – generate a commitment to learning within the family and community; broaden horizons, bridge as well as bond – go outside the comfort zone.
- Attainment may increase due to investment in schools, but narrowing the gap between the poor and the rest also requires investment in partnerships – 36% FSM difference in boys!!
- Key points are “hard to reach parents”, youth and children’s services (health, welfare, youth services, justice and training/employment) and their integration.
- Location of services within the school and/or funding to resource partnerships in low SES areas e.g. Inspiring Communities and Extended Services.
- Local Strategic Partnership LSP (14-19) – brings together education and labour market initiatives – local prioritisation, strategic planning.
- Clusters – a key mechanism; Secondary and Primary and creating an economy of scale to build collaboration with key partners e.g. “hard to reach parents” – Parent Support Adviser.
- NEET Strategy linked to 14-19 LSP – tracking, personalised support and guidance, the September Guarantee.
- TYS reforms, early identification, common assessment framework, support across transition – some concern about overemphasis upon case management – needs a balance between case management, capacity building and activity (use of arts, sport and culture widespread).

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERING

- Understand and connect activity to partners and business yet the primary goal is the shared goal of the partnership
- Team approach within the partnering organisations; embed into core business, continuity of contacts and local presence
- Basics – message response system; time committed for partnership sustainability
- Clarity and mutual respect for strength and limitations of partners
- Build and maintain personal relationships and induct new people into the culture of partnering
- Structured approach to the review and development of the partnership
 1. shared review with independent facilitator
 2. agreed cross partners professional development
 3. sustainability- 2-3 years means a better chance to embed the activity into curriculum (core business of schools)
 4. the role of the Partnership Broker can be a vital help

This could be part of the **“EDUCATION REVOLUTION”**