



Growing pains

A survey of youth workers

May 2016

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Introduction

This survey is part of UNISON Scotland's Damage series: a series of surveys looking at the impact of the Age of Austerity on services and those who deliver them.

The Conservative Government's Austerity programme will result in a further £2billion of cuts to Scotland's public services. Sadly the cuts that services have already endured, since the banking crisis, are having a serious impact on public bodies' ability to deliver high quality services. The decisions made by the Scottish Government mean that local government is bearing the brunt of the cuts to public sector budgets. Of the 50,000 jobs cut in the public sector 40,000 have been in local government. The next round of cuts will be worse for local government with at least another 15,000 jobs under threat. While redundancy has been voluntary work doesn't disappear and the remaining staff have had to take on extra work while services are salami sliced. This is no longer sustainable.

The salami slicing of services doesn't have the same impact in the media as closures of single employers but our research shows that the cuts are and will continue to have just as serious an impact on service delivery, workers lives and Scotland's economy. These surveys aim to capture the detailed impact of cuts on services and the workers who remain.

In order to capture more detail on the impact of the cuts UNISON Scotland conducted a survey of members who are employed to do youth work. Respondents worked across a range of local authorities in Scotland in varied roles including:

- **Youth support workers**
- **Literacy and numeracy workers**
- **Home school partnership officers**
- **Family support workers**
- **Young person's alcohol counsellor**

These job titles cover a wide range of activities undertaken to support young people across Scotland. Their work aims to support young people to achieve their full potential through developing specific skills and self esteem, self confidence and resilience.

Key issues

- Staff are under enormous pressure to deliver a high quality service with increasing demand and fewer resources
- Budgets have been cut leading to job losses among youth workers
- Budget cuts have led to changes in the focus of youth work leading to more generic less preventative services
- Morale among youth workers is very low and few expect it to improve

Summary

This survey is part of UNISON Scotland's Damage series: a set of surveys looking at the impact of the 'Age of Austerity' on services and those who deliver them.

The Conservative Government's Austerity programme will result in a further £2billion of cuts to Scotland's public services. Sadly the cuts that services have already endured, since the banking crisis, are having a serious impact on public bodies' ability to deliver high quality services. The decisions made by the Scottish Government mean that local government is bearing the brunt of the cuts to public sector budgets. Of the 50,000 jobs cut in the public sector 40,000 have been in local government. The next round of cuts will be worse for local government with at least another 15,000 jobs under threat. While redundancy has been voluntary, work doesn't disappear and the remaining staff have had to take on extra work while services are salami sliced. This is no longer sustainable.

This survey focuses on the impact of the Age of Austerity on members who are employed to do youth work. Respondents worked across a range of local authorities in Scotland in varied roles covering a wide range of activities undertaken to support young people across Scotland. Their work aims to support young people to achieve their full potential through developing specific skills and self esteem, self confidence and resilience.

Earlier this year Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning¹ welcomed research valuing youth work at £656m, with a return of £7 for every £1 spent². Sadly these warm words have not been accompanied by appropriate funding to continue to deliver such a valuable service. The responses to our survey show that funding is being cut and these cuts are having a detrimental effect of services, and our members who are struggling to deliver with limited resources. Budget cuts impact not only on young people in the short and long term but also on the wider community and, as the YouthLink report shows, our economy.

79% of those who responded stated that there had been cuts or severe cuts to their team budgets this year, 82% said the same about "last year" and 83% said cuts or severe cuts over the last five years. Comments left in response to this question indicate that the budget cuts have led to job cuts and to vacancy freezing. Members also stated that the cuts were impacting on the level and standard of the services they were trying to deliver. Provision in some places is increasingly reliant on volunteers, some workers were even spending their own money to enable some activities to continue.

Members were then asked more specifically about the impact of any budget cuts on jobs. While as is often the case in local government redundancy numbers are not at the levels which attract headlines, most indicated that one or two members of staff had been made redundant. Some have though seen job cuts as high as 11 but losing even one member of staff from a small team has a substantial impact on the ability to maintain service levels.

Over 70% of those who took part in our survey have seen an increase in their workloads in the last few years. Respondents indicated that it was not just that the amount of work that had changed although that was the case, with most experiencing much higher workloads than in the past. The nature of the work has also changed with many now expected to take on work that had previously been done by more senior staff. Others have seen their role widened taking on work out with their previous remit.

Despite Scottish Government/Christie Commission talking about moving to a preventative model for the last five years respondents felt that preventative work was not being prioritised. Other comments highlight the impact of budget cuts which mean that activities can no longer go ahead. Not only does this mean young people lose out on the activity but the processes whereby they are involved in decision making are undermined. In some cases taking part in the planning and deciding are actually more important to reaching outcomes than the activity itself.

As in our previous reports cuts are leading to many working unpaid hours to ensure that service users' needs are met. Over 40% of respondents indicated that they work extra unpaid hours frequently/most weeks while another 32% said they did so now and again. Members indicate that they do this because they want to try and maintain service provision despite the cuts.

Members are feeling anxious, undervalued and stressed. Over 70% describe morale in their teams as low or very low, with 14% saying it's fine and only 12% describing morale as good. No one said morale is very good. This is work that is very people focused, you cannot, in the long term, deliver a high quality personal service with such low morale.

The reasons given are concerns about the future of their jobs because of the cuts, the difficulties of dealing with constant change, lack of communication and poor management and lack of respect and low wages. Many feel that the passion and commitment that brought them into youth work is not valued and they feel that commitment slipping away. Where people do feel better it is about the support that they get from their team members.

As we continue to gather information from our members about the impact of budgets on their ability to do their jobs we see more and more just how severe the situation is becoming.

The responses to our youth workers' survey show that funding is being cut and these cuts are having a detrimental effect of services. Our members who are struggling to deliver with limited resources. This will impact not only on the young people in the short and long term but also on the wider community and our economy.

Demand for youth services is not falling. We cannot pretend the cuts are not hurting.

¹ *Third Force News*. 29th January, 2016

² *Youth Link Scotland 'The Social and Economic Value of Youth Work 2016'*
<http://www.hallaitken.co.uk/News/youth-work-changes-lives.html> Youthlink

Youth work

Youth work is a generic term covering a wide range of roles supporting young people. YouthLink the national agency for youth work state that youth work outcomes are that young people:

- **Are confident resilient and optimistic for the future**
- **Manage personal, social, and formal relationships**
- **Create, describe and apply their learning skills**
- **Participate safely and effectively in groups**
- **Consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control**
- **Express their voice and demonstrate social commitment**
- **Broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking**

This work supports the following Scottish Government National Outcomes:

- **Young people are successful learners confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens**
- **Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed**
- **We have tackled significant inequalities in Scottish society**
- **We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk**
- **We have strong resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibilities for their own actions and how they affect others**

These laudable outcomes will not be achieved without appropriate investment in youth work services and the staff who work there. Responses to our survey show that services are at risk from budget cuts and that staff are stressed and struggling to meet demand

Earlier this year Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning welcomed research valuing youth work at £656m, with a return of £7 for every £1 spent. Sadly these warm words have not been accompanied by appropriate funding to continue to deliver such a valuable service. The responses to our survey show that funding is being cut and these cuts are having a detrimental effect of services and UNISON members who are struggling to deliver with limited resources. This will impact not only on the young people in the short and long term but also on the wider community and as the report shows our economy.

It is almost five years since The Christie Commission report called for a move towards preventative spending but cuts to local government mean that Scotland is instead moving in the opposite direction. Youth work is the epitome of preventative spending, investing in young people to ensure that they can reach their full potential offers long and short term savings across a range of budgets from police and justice to health, welfare and education.

In the short term, young people and the communities in which they live benefit from young people taking part in positive activities, some of which benefit directly their communities and for many divert young people from other more anti social activities. Young people's short and long term health and wellbeing is supported not just by any sports they participate in but in the wider sense of health they benefit from the confidence and good mental health they get from taking part in positive activities. Health is also improved from reducing harmful / risky activities like drug and alcohol misuse. Cuts to youth work will lead to increased costs in the long term and in the short term.

Survey

UNISON Scotland conducted a survey of members who are employed to do youth work. Respondents worked across a range of local authorities in Scotland in varied roles including:

- **Youth support workers**
- **Literacy and numeracy workers**
- **Home school partnership officers**
- **Family support workers**
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These job titles cover a wide range of activities undertaken to support young people across Scotland. Their work aims to support young people to achieve their full potential through developing specific skills and self esteem, self confidence and resilience.



What the staff say

When asked to give a brief description of their work respondents said:

- *Support staff to care for and entertain young people in a safe environment while working towards NLC.*
- *I support young people 16-25 years who have their own tenancy. These young people require additional support as they are at risk of losing their tenancy. I support them to address the issues that they have to get them in control of managing their house and not to become homeless*
- *My main remit is to support the Council to recruit Modern Apprentices, including organising training and being the key contact for the Council, apprentices and training providers. I also support an LGBT group and any other duties the management team ask me to do.*
- *I work with a lot of young people who's parents won't let them out at night because it isn't safe. But trust us to look after them in a safe environment. I work under 12s it keeps them safe and off the streets. They learn all different life skills that they will find useful in the future.*
- *Work with age 15+ delivering literacy, numeracy, ICT learning.*

- *Provide opportunities for young people to build social skills, reduce isolation provide education about health and wellbeing. Offer recognised awards and certificates to celebrate success and learning.*
- *I am a senior worker in 4 youth clubs in XXX age range 9-19, I work with young people doing various activities and life skills, always available if a young person needs someone to talk to and include them on anything that is going to be taken place in clubs.*
- *I help facilitate personal, social and educational growth in young people to help them reach their full potential in society. I also assess the needs of young people, and planning and delivering programmes related to areas such as health, fitness, smoking, drugs, gangs, violence, relationships and bullying;*
- *Manage a team who work directly with vulnerable young people. Staff work on Lifestyle, Health and Wellbeing programmes including working toward gaining accreditation (eg, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, NL Challenge, Youth Achievements). Also work with young people who are NEET - working on individual Activity Agreements to support young people, 16+, back into employment or further training.*
- *I work with Vulnerable Young People offering advice, information, guidance and support on a number of areas such as self harm, suicide, employability etc and deliver training on White Ribbon, SHARE (sexual health) Respect Me (Anti - Bullying) and New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) . I also manage the Scottish Employers Recruitment Incentive (SERI) in Stirling.*

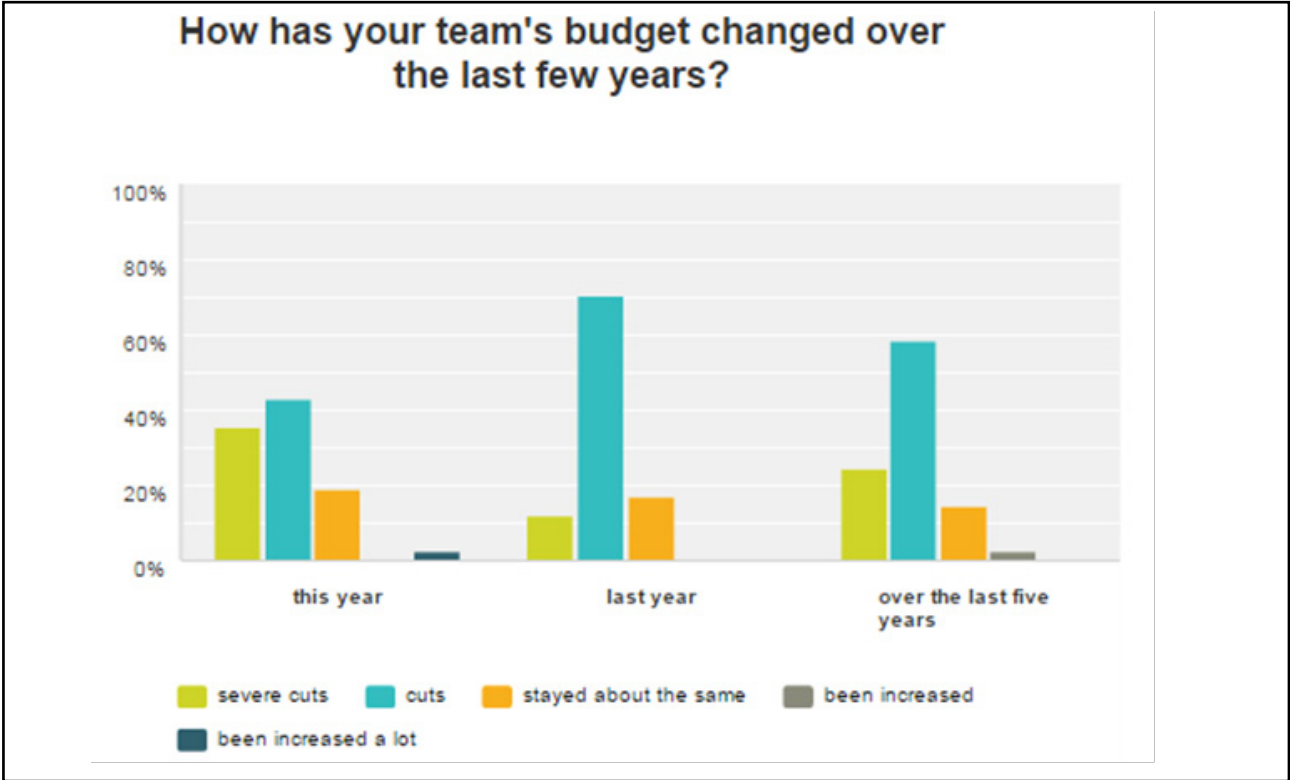
This is important work that supports young people to be positive members of their community and achieve their full potential. The wider community also benefits from having young members who are engaged in positive activities and preventing those at risk from harming themselves or others through crime and antisocial behaviour. This work offers both short and long term financial savings to a range of budgets from police and justice to health and education. These benefits are at risk without funding for youth services. As the YouthLink report, referenced earlier, states every pound spent generates £7. Despite this, responses to our survey indicate that youth work budgets are being cut, jobs are being lost and these cuts are impacting on the service that members are able to deliver to young people.

Level of cuts

When asked “how has your team's budget changed over the last few years?”

- 79% of those who responded stated that there had been cuts or severe cuts this year
- 82% said the same about “last year”
- 83% said cuts or severe cuts over the last five years

Comments left in response to this question indicate that the budget cuts have led to job cuts and to vacancy freezing.



What the staff say

- *Posts are generally delayed, and not advertised for some time after vacancy, leaving workers unsure if they will be frozen as is happening to other council posts e.g. NHS.*
- *Over the past 5 years we have lost 11 full time staff*
- *Budgets are tight. Posts are not being replaced (from Vol severance) meaning trying to deliver on outcomes is difficult.*

Some respondents indicated that they expect more cuts in the near future :

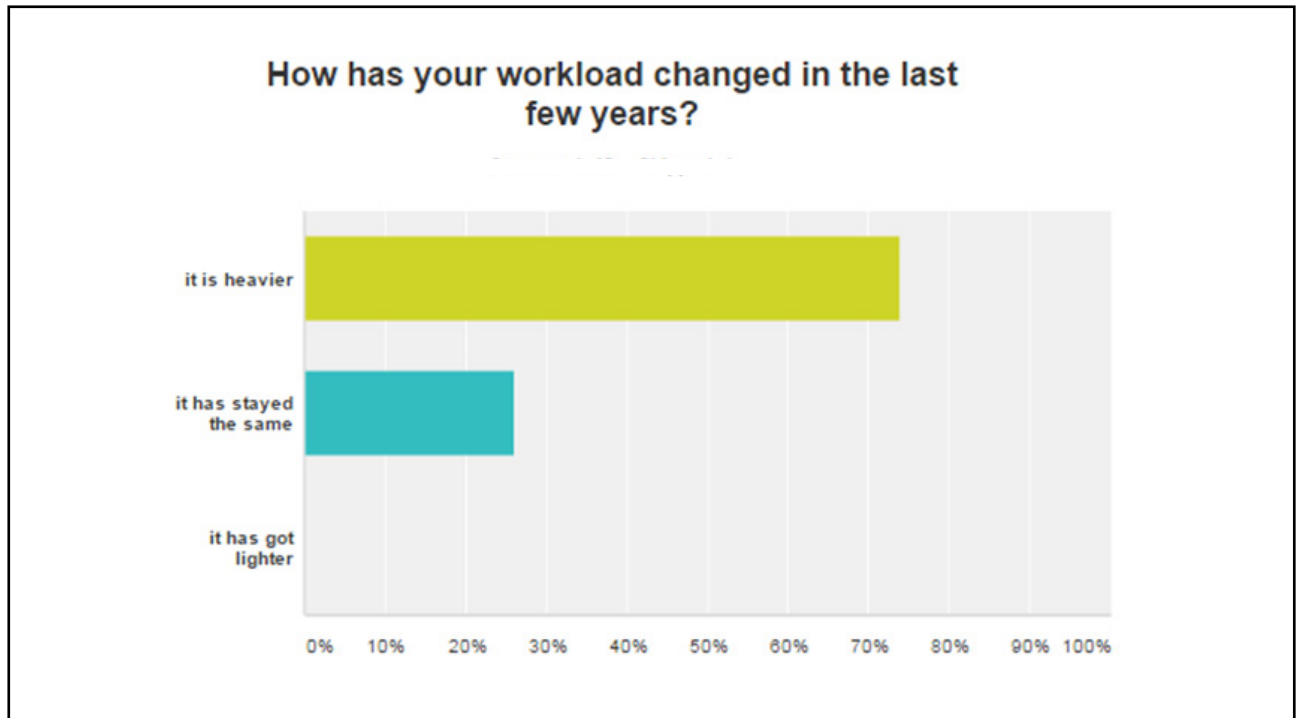
- *Proposed 40% cut in staff across CLD service. 80+ are to be removed and CLD redesigned to no longer be community based.*
- *We have taken on a couple of staff on a temporary basis. The sessional budget has been cut by 20%. But this has not impacted os services yet. Not seen this years figures yet, not expecting huge cuts, though this could still happen.*
- *Forty percent reduction in staff to come and no budgets*

Members also stated that the cuts were impacting on the level and standard of the services they were trying to deliver. A provision in some places is increasingly reliant of volunteers some were even spending their own money to enable some activities to continue.

- *The service provided each year are cut due to the lack of funding. Cuts to funds affect the services we deliver to YP. we have been struggling to maintain standards as a result which has a direct effect on what the teams are trying to deliver.*
- *Not enough funds to get young people away on breaks, as some of our young people come from difficult backgrounds.*
- *Everything has to be done with no budget, we have to use public transport with the young people paying themselves for activities. This has an impact on who can participate with those from low income back grounds being marginalised*
- *Cutting budgets has slashed to amount of young people who attend our services. With a lack of physical resources many young people choose to stay away. The council having to always work towards the CCofE or XXXChallenge or DovE awards means we do not have the option of having drop in facilities and we do not have the resources to keep young people attending week in week out. Staff moral is on the floor and service users are aware of this. If staff such as myself had not been forced to pay for certain items or events out of our own pockets groups would have even less*
- *Less able to buy in specialist sessions, resources diminishing, unable to provide opportunities for young people in outdoor activities. Having to be dependent on volunteers to enable groups to happen*
- *Money Sessional Reduced Council Resources Trying to Deliver Cuts Work Team Young People Reduction Stop Resulted Lost 11*

Job cuts

Members were then asked more specifically about the impact of any budget cuts on jobs. While as is often the case in local government redundancy numbers are not at the levels which attract headlines, members report the loss of one or two members of staff from their teams. (Some have though seen job cuts as high as 11) but losing even one member of staff from a small team has a substantial impact on the ability to maintain service levels



What the staff say

- *Yes, people have been put on secondment, most people on part time temporary contracts*
- *We did have 3 CLD Community Youth Workers at one point. This is now down to 1*
- *40% of our team is about to be cut*

The cuts have had a significant impact on workload for remaining staff. Over 70% of those who took part in our survey have seen an increase in their workloads in the last few years. Respondents indicated that it was not just the amount of work that had changed, although that was the case with most experiencing much higher workloads than in the past. The nature of the work has changed with many now expected to take on work that had previously been done by more senior staff. Others have seen their role widened taking on work out with their previous remit.

- *More clients*
- *We have been taking on new pieces of work without dropping anything off the other end.*
- *Workloads are picked up From colleagues who Leave and workloads are doubled*
- *Calls have increased as the service has grown*
- *More pressure on getting young people through awards, not enough staff so staff to young people ratio is more than should be*

Members were asked about the changing nature of their work.

- *CLD Staff under more pressure so passing work onto support staff more.*
- *I still focus on Housing, but there is pressure to cover community based work and summer programmes.*
- *The work has changed as, although I still work with young people, there has been a decrease in the numbers referred and consequently I also cover older service users who share different experiences to the young people and this work can mean contact with other Services such as Children & Families or Criminal Justice*
- *I am more often asked to complete tasks that I would not have done before*
- *Taking up work of those that have left and not been replaced*
- *Anyone who leaves or is seconded is not replaced so it is left to the existing team to take over this work*

Some felt that their job was less unique than it had been in the past, that there was no longer room for innovation or for offering an individualised support for clients. Others indicated that work was much more stressful than in the past and that they were indulging in box ticking rather than in depth work and that they had much more paperwork to complete.

- *Staff reduction has meant that my role has changed a few times within the service and now I feel there is no uniqueness in what we are being asked to deliver.*
- *Although the amount of work related stress and pressure has gone up. For a 2 hour a week post I work approximately another 2 hours unpaid either collecting resources or calling staff to liaise with them. Or trying to promote the group so that we do not get closed down.*
- *Due to reduction in staff and hours the groups that have remained have had resources and equipment and staff reduced. This has impacted negatively on the groups and workers and more time is needed by workers to prep and come up with options for activities to keep the young people interested as well as having to spend larger amounts of time on paperwork and recordings and accredited program work. The accredited program work which is now required by all groups takes longer to complete especially from targeted young people who may have trouble with literacy.*
- *We are continually being streamlined and redesigned. The work that we do is no longer supporting vulnerable young people but ticking boxes within Education by delivering soft skills such as Saltire Awards etc. We are constantly being moved from service to service and have recently been positioned within education. As a result, because teachers are protected the bulk of the savings within the education service will be made by us.*

These findings were supported by members' responses when they were specifically asked if the nature of their work had changed. This involves changes in the team or department they work for:

- *Nature changed as detailed above and I now consider myself more a part of the counselling team than the team working specifically with young people which has also evolved in its delivery of the service.*
- *Yes. We are now more education based in our approach and outcomes and accredited work which needs smaller groups to be manageable and completed.*

Others report that the focus of youth work has changed towards for example qualifications or employability.

- *Staff members have been redeployed and job shared. Work has been moving towards a more attainment based system rather than informal educational youth work.*
- *Same team more emphasis on employability and more target pressure*

Many felt that their work was now focusing on meeting outcomes targets rather than the needs of the individual young people.

- *However, there are areas of work being pushed to the side as staff are being expected to work across all 3 CLD strands - there seems to be a move to become more generic. However there is added pressure to ensure high numbers of accredited awards are being met.*
- *Yes. We have been forced to become a part of education with school-based work in our remit (more than before). We have become a run-of-the-mill service and are not focussing on our most vulnerable.*

Some indicated that the nature of their work was being changed for the worse because of budget cuts.

- *It is harder to get resources to maintain the running of the groups.*
- *Absolutely. I no longer provide valuable 1-1 support for vulnerable 'at risk' young people but carry out soft skill remits that tick boxes.*

A group of six young adults are sitting in a circle on a light-colored tiled floor, engaged in a group discussion or therapy session. The group consists of three men and three women. One man on the right is holding a clipboard. They are all dressed in casual clothing like t-shirts, jeans, and plaid shirts. The setting appears to be a large, open room with a tiled floor.

What the staff say

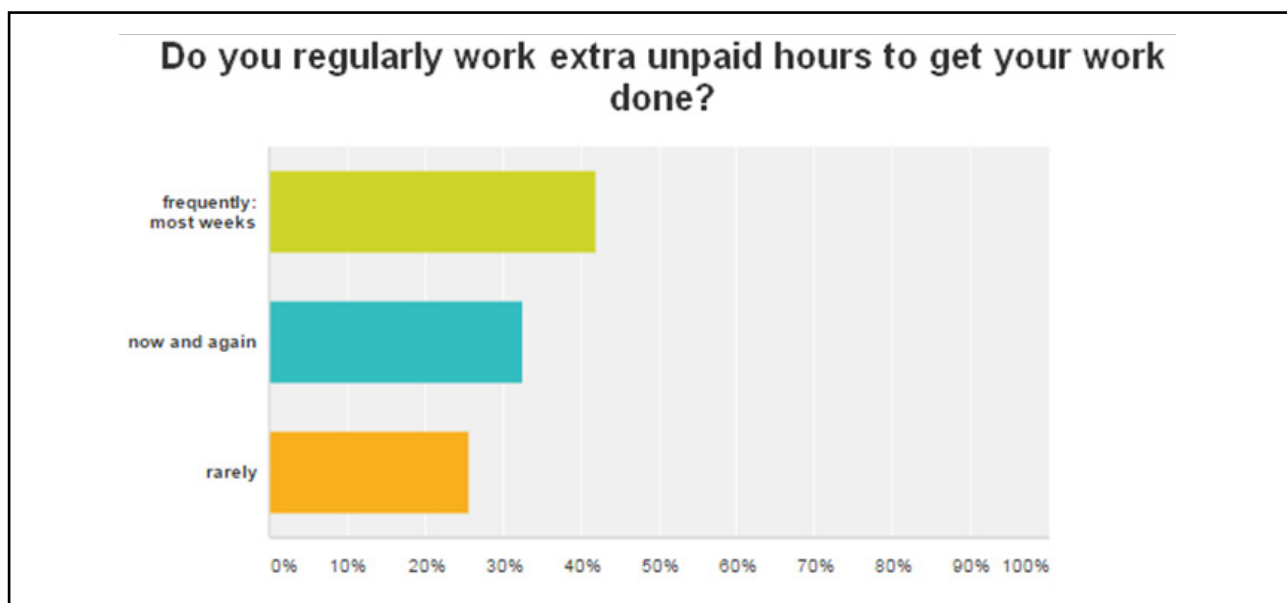
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Other comments highlight the impact of budget cuts which mean that activities can no longer go ahead. Not only does this mean young people lose out on the activity but the processes whereby they are involved in decision making are undermined. In some cases taking part in the planning and deciding are actually more important to reaching outcomes than the activity itself. Key youth work outcomes include:

- Considering risk, making reasoned decisions and taking control
 - Participating safely and effectively in groups
 - Broadening their perspectives through new experiences.
- *Youth work is no longer important. Only accredited work such as XXXXX challenges or DofE is considered worthwhile. Young people who struggle to attend every week are no longer cared or catered for. There is no such thing as learning for learnings sake.*
 - *During planning we consult with the young people on which activities they would like to undertake however we find that we are now having to say no to a lot of their ideas as we cannot fund them or do not have the resources to carry them out.*
 - *Members also mention that pressure is being exerted to get young people onto any training course/ placement rather than finding something that suits their needs.*
 - *Some are made do courses they don't want to meet targets some suffer from lack of courses to suit them personally*

Workload

Cuts are leading to many working unpaid hours to ensure that service users' needs are met. Over 40% of respondents indicated that they work extra unpaid hours frequently/most weeks while another 32% said they did so now and again. Members indicate that they do this because they want to try and maintain service provision despite the cuts. Many are finding this increasingly difficult and some indicate that they are cutting back: partly to recover some work life balance but also because they feel that they are undervalued.



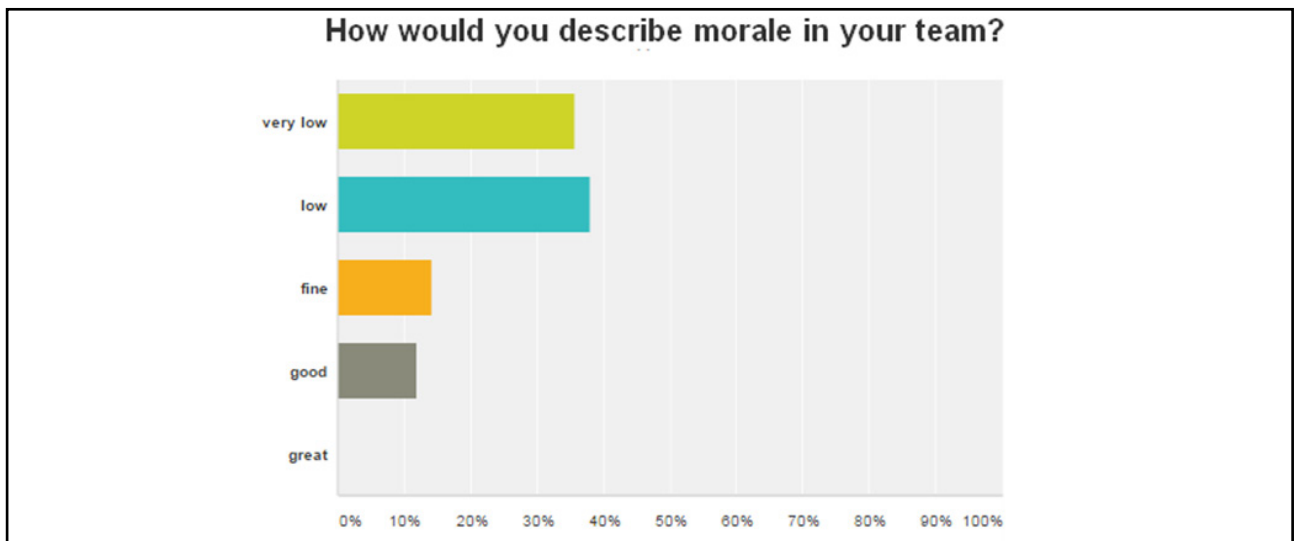
What the staff say

- Sometimes to fit in preparation of work for individual children.
- I spent many years working extra hours for nothing. I have for some time refused to do this, although there is definitely a notion amongst some colleagues that voluntary overtime is a noble pursuit (that myth is not unique to this area).
- We introduced a toil diary, this helped a lot in tracking unpaid hours. We are much better at taking time back than we were.
- Due to the extra need for preparation work, and lack of funds for programs and special occasions many staff work the extra hours unpaid and buy resources themselves.
- My employer is somewhat unaware of this. Our advice, guidance centre had been cut from 20 hours open to 12 hours open in the last year with no planning etc. So any prep work has to be done in own time, for example interview prep session with a young people. Also due to reduced hours we often are filing and tidying after we close but are not paid after centre closes. In clubs we prepare activities in our own time and I have been advised by one supervisor that if we were to be paid for planning, the club programme duration would need to be shorter to cover costs so we would still be paid the same and only the young people would lose out.
- Must be the most undervalued job. We get no paid time to buy what we need for clubs. Regularly buy in own time and in some clubs with low funds subsidise clubs ourselves

Morale

Members are feeling anxious, undervalued and stressed. Over 70% describe morale in their teams as low or very low, with 14% saying it's fine and only 12% describing morale as good. No one said morale is very good. This is work that is very people focused. You cannot, in the long term, deliver a high quality personal service with such low morale.

The reasons given are concerns about the future of their jobs because of the cuts, the difficulties of dealing with constant change, lack of communication and poor management and lack of respect and low wages. Many feel that the passion and commitment that brought them into youth work is not valued and they feel that commitment slipping away. Where people do feel better it is about the support that they get from their team members.



What the staff say

- We have worked together for a long time. We are very tight knit and share problems with and support each other through good and bad times. Other teams think we are a bit mental, they might be right.*
- As CLD workers with supportive immediate management, we have come together as a team in the face of the cuts. Although we are all concerned, we are trying to be positive.*
- Staff have been through so many changes over the past few years that they have found coping mechanisms and we talk regularly about it. Also each individual worker is passionate about the work they do and know that if they feel down this will affect other staff and the young people that they work with.*
- Everyone is fed up of being treated without respect and of continually being fed bad news after bad news with regard to wages, job security and workloads/remits.*
- Uncertainty about the future, not able to plan our work because of this. No communication on the future of the service or our jobs.*
- We are all anxious but have to keep pressing on until we know exactly what is happening*
- With staff cuts hanging over us a lot of staff feel that we are not valued as a service and are very demotivated.*
- Due to the very eminent cuts and our short unsociable hours and high expectations for paperwork and delivery of programs with limited or no funds. As well as staff cuts and low wages and pressure to maintain or increase group numbers and recruit in our own time and unpaid to save our groups we feel are very undervalued and under paid for the level of expectations and responsibility.*

Do you expect morale to improve in the next few years?

A horizontal bar chart with a light gray background and vertical grid lines at 10% intervals. The x-axis is labeled from 0% to 100% at the bottom. There are three bars on the left, each with a label to its left. The top bar is green and extends to approximately 4% on the x-axis. The middle bar is red and extends to approximately 74% on the x-axis. The bottom bar is blue and extends to approximately 20% on the x-axis.

| Response | Percentage |
|----------|------------|
| Yes | 4% |
| No | 74% |
| not sure | 20% |

- Members' final comments highlight members concerns about the future:

- *Love my job and worry how cuts will impact on my local community*
- *Luckily, my team are mostly positive people. The impending cuts are scary but until we know what they are, we cannot react.*
- *Cuts will get worse*
- *I feel that we are left in limbo at times in relation to receiving information about the changes to the service. A lot of the time staff are guessing/surmising what is happening, which is very worrying and stressful for all staff. It also feels like we are getting different versions of events from different people, which is very worrying for staff and for the young people of Stirling. It seems to be that we are last to know information and are often left feeling uncertain as to where we will be in a week/month/year.*

- *The communities will suffer as a consequence of these cuts*
- *Love my work but don't know if I am going to be in a job from one week to the next which is very unnerving.*
- *We have a great repour with young people and want to offer them the best and invest in our communities future.*
- *Going by the suggestions made re the cuts our service will be cut by 40% yet we are being expected to carry out other work - due to cuts in other services. It doesn't make any sense!*

Conclusion

As we continue to gather information from our members about the impact of budgets on their ability to do their jobs we see more and more just how severe the situation is becoming.

The responses to our survey show that funding is being cut and these cuts are having a detrimental effect on services and our members who are struggling to deliver with limited resources. This will impact not only on the young people in the short and long term but also on the wider community and our economy.

Demand for youth services is not falling. We cannot pretend the cuts are not hurting.

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