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CODE OF OCCUPATIONAL ETHICS FOR THE YOUTH SERVICE IN WALES

What is a Code of Ethics?

A code of ethics is a set of principles of conduct within an organisation that guide decision making and behaviour. The purpose of this code is to provide Youth Service workers and managers with guidelines for making ethical choices in the conduct of their work. Occupational integrity is the cornerstone of workers' credibility. Youth Workers adopt an occupational code of ethics to share a dedication to ethical behaviour and to declare the occupational principles and standards of their practice,

The Youth Service

The Youth Service in Wales is the term used to describe the occupation within which a unique form of work with young people is undertaken by both the local authority and voluntary sector organisations. This work is directed by a clear understanding of organisational purpose and values and an historical way of working which requires the Youth Worker to recognise young people as individuals, capable of change and positive development. What young people are during their adolescent years may not necessarily be what they remain for the rest of their lives; particularly if they have access to a range of meaningful self determined activities, which are supported by appropriate adults.

Purpose and Values

The key purpose of the occupation of Youth Work

'To enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential'

Values at the core of Youth Work

- Young people choose to be involved, not least because they want to relax, meet friends, make new relationships, to have fun, and to find support;
- The work starts from where young people are in relation to their own values, views and principles, as well as their own personal and social space;
- It seeks to go beyond where young people start, to widen their horizons, promote participation and invite social commitment, in particular by encouraging them to be critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them;
- It treats young people with respect, valuing each individual and their differences, and promoting the acceptance and understanding of others, whilst challenging oppressive behaviour and ideas;
- It respects and values individual differences by supporting and strengthening young people's belief in themselves, and their capacity to grow and to change through a

supportive group environment;

- It is underpinned by the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence;
- It recognises, respects and is actively responsive to the wider networks of peers; communities, families and cultures which are important to young people, and through these networks seeks to help young people to achieve stronger relationships and collective identities, through the promotion of inclusivity;
- It works in partnership with young people and other agencies which contribute to young people's social, educational and personal development;
- It is concerned with how young people feel, and not just with what they know and can do;
- It is concerned with facilitating and empowering the voice of young people, encouraging and enabling them to influence the environment in which they live;
- It recognises the young person as a partner in a learning process, complementing formal education, promoting their access to learning opportunities which enable them to fulfil their potential;
- It safeguards the welfare of young people, and provides them with a safe environment in which to explore their values, beliefs, ideas and issues.

National Occupational Standards (NOS) 2008

This Code of Ethics is written for those workers who are committed to working with young people aged 11-25 in a range of locations and through a wide and varied programme of activities in a way that clearly recognises and adheres to the purpose of Youth Work and its associated values.

Code of Occupational Ethics

The Code of Ethics is concerned with 5 specific areas. These are:

1. Occupational intervention;
2. Responsibility for young people;
3. Responsibility for colleagues;
4. Responsibility to employers;
5. Responsibility to the occupation.

1. Occupational intervention

(a) Those who work with young people predominantly in the non-formal and informal education context have a personal responsibility concerning themselves and the nature of their intervention. They should plan and reflect on all aspects of their intervention and organise their work continually to do so. They need at all times to be aware of their role in different contexts, the likely dilemmas in each situation, the purpose of their intervention, the limitations of their role and power and the latest ideas concerning effective practice in the area of intervention concerned. They should at all times be aware of the policies, procedures, and guidance available to them to support work with young people in a safe, legal and educationally productive environment. The range of programme approaches and activities should be continually updated so that the Youth Worker is able to offer a wide range of appropriate educational experiences to the young people they work with. In providing these educational experiences, Youth Workers must work towards enabling young people achieve the outcomes identified in the National Youth Service Strategy: **active participation; wider skills development; and enhanced emotional competence**. The Strategy recognises that evaluating the impact of the involvement of young people in Youth Service programmes is complex and involves the use of a wide range of tools. These include

those capable of measuring personal achievement, which will mainly depend on individual young people developing the skills of reflection and self assessment of their involvement in the wide range of experiences and opportunities.

(b) All those who are identified as Youth Workers through their involvement in a form of work described in such documents as the National Youth Service Strategy, Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales and the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work, have particular responsibilities to:

- 1.1 be appropriately qualified in accordance with the criteria laid down in the National Youth Service Strategy;
- 1.2 work with young people in a way that clearly demonstrates a commitment to the purpose, principles and values of the occupation;
- 1.3 develop and utilise skills, knowledge and experience as effectively as possible;
- 1.4 undertake in-service training and occupational development in order to remain up to date on specific occupational issues and relevant curricula and legal issues;
- 1.5 regularly reflect upon attitudes and methods of intervention in order to renew motivation and manage dilemmas;
- 1.6 maintain high personal standards of occupational conduct and avoid acts which may bring the occupation or service into disrepute, or which may diminish the trust and confidence of the public;
- 1.7 foster good interpersonal relationships with all those involved with the service;
- 1.8 behave and act reliably and consistently;
- 1.9 manage conflict and boundaries objectively and in the interests of the delivery of educational programmes to young people;

- 1.10 acknowledge personal limitations in knowledge and competence and to decline duties or responsibilities if unable to perform them in a safe and skilled manner;
- 1.11 seek advice as necessary;
- 1.12 ensure that occupational practice is not influenced by personal gain or commercial considerations;
- 1.13 continuously evaluate outcomes and dilemmas encountered in the course of occupational duties and to reflect on them in an organised manner with colleagues;
- 1.14 be aware of, and take responsibility for, occupational, personal, physical and mental competencies required to meet service users' needs;
- 1.15 not work under the influence of substances that impair the quality of judgments and occupational conduct;
- 1.16 ensure the safety of service users at all times and to ensure the use of appropriate equipment, clothing, insurances and procedures etc;
- 1.17 avoid the personalisation of issues with users and colleagues at work;
- 1.18 act in a way that encourages equal opportunities, opposes discriminatory action or policy and harassing, intimidating or bullying behaviour.

(c) It is recognised that those working with young people have a particular responsibility to maintain and enhance the physical, emotional and educational well being of the young people they work with and to provide them with honest descriptions of roles and responsibilities and opportunities. It is therefore important to have contemporary knowledge, where appropriate, of:

- 1.19 health and safety legislation and good practice;
- 1.20 the law as it effects young people, families and citizen's rights;
- 1.21 anti-discriminatory practice and legislation;

- 1.22 employment law, practice and policies;
- 1.23 the employers' expectations;
- 1.24 good practice in advice and guidance;
- 1.25 effective communication skills;
- 1.26 the needs and aspirations of young people;
- 1.27 educational, social policy, welfare and other support opportunities available to young people.

2. Responsibility for young people

(a) Those working with young people have a responsibility to:

- 2.1 promote policies and practice that enhance the self determination, self esteem, collective responsibility and the active citizenship of young people;
- 2.2 promote the rights of young people and their parents and guardians;
- 2.3 advise, befriend and counsel young people for the purpose of extending and developing their experiences, interests, awareness and responsibility;
- 2.4 assist young people in the transition to adulthood by respecting and understanding their needs at a time of physical and emotional change;
- 2.5 respecting confidences shared by young people and their privacy while upholding those established protection and employment guidelines developed to support and protect young people and ensuring that the welfare and personal safety of the young person are at all times primary;
- 2.6 involve young people in the development of the occupation;
- 2.7 create and ensure the maintenance of safe and healthy settings that foster young people's physical, intellectual, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development;

- 2.8 avoid participation in and inform appropriate authorities of practices which are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, intimidating, psychologically damaging or physically harmful to young people;
 - 2.9 protect young people from abuse and neglect;
 - 2.10 report abuse and neglect so that action can be taken;
 - 2.11 *avoid commissioning or assisting an infringement of the law where that law seeks to protect young people and the wider community from harm [need to use appropriate legal terms].*
- (b)** In this work, which is primarily concerned with the creation of non-formal and informal learning opportunities for the purpose of social education, Youth Workers working with young people need to ensure clear boundaries at all times between occupational and personal relationships. In particular they must:
- 2.12 ensure that young people themselves understand the boundaries between occupation and personal relationships;
 - 2.13 avoid emotional dependency relationships with young people;
 - 2.14 avoid sexual intimacy with young people inside and outside work;
 - 2.15 challenge the use of inappropriate words and language;
 - 2.16 respect the physical and emotional privacy of young people;
 - 2.17 adopt a young-people-first approach at all times;
 - 2.18 develop occupational relationships with young people and their families in a way that is not concerned to achieve power over them for personal interest, gain or fulfilment;
 - 2.19 ensure that educational needs within the occupation are paramount and not those of commercial or other interests.

(c) Youth Workers work with a variety of individuals and agencies to secure provision and meet the needs of young people. This work should have as its prime focus the meeting of the needs of young people and the encouragement of collaborative partnerships that enable communities and young people to further their interests and create new, and more varied, learning opportunities by being more involved in decision making processes. Youth Workers will need to assure parents and guardians, and other agencies where appropriate, that their planned intervention and processes are transparent and comprehensible and that all staff working with young people are appropriately trained and supported.

3. Responsibility to colleagues

Those who work with young people have responsibilities to their immediate colleagues and to staff and volunteers in other agencies seeking to collaborate with the service to benefit young people. There are therefore occupational responsibilities, where appropriate, to:

- 3.1 foster occupational working relationships from which excellence in practice can be a continual aim;
- 3.2 treat colleagues with respect, courtesy, fairness and good faith;
- 3.3 register with the appropriate registration authority;
- 3.4 maintain occupational relationships of trust and co operation;
- 3.5 ensure that those who work with young people are appropriately managed and supported on the basis of clear expectations and boundaries;
- 3.6 act as a member of a team, sharing information, concerns and opportunities and ensuring effective communications, prompt responses and mutual support;
- 3.7 support, train, supervise and manage colleagues according to occupation-agreed, properly negotiated and understood policies and procedures;

- 3.8 observe confidentiality in respect of discussions with colleagues about their occupation problems and difficulties;
- 3.9 challenge ineffective practice and, if necessary, draw this to the attention of colleagues within the organisation in order to improve performance;
- 3.10 participate in the design and implementation of agreed monitoring mechanisms;
- 3.11 seek to resolve differences and difficulties openly, swiftly and within the recognised organisation channels of communication;
- 3.12 uphold health and safety legislation and ensure that all potential risks and dangers are appropriately notified;
- 3.13 promote equality of access to in-service training opportunities.

4. Responsibility to employers

(a) Those who work with young people either paid or unpaid will contribute, depending upon the level of development of the employing organisation, to the creation of a clear and comprehensive set of employment policies and practices that make explicit the contractual terms of the employment of Youth Workers. There is therefore a responsibility to fulfil and develop contractual obligations and duties in the interests of the service and the occupation.

(b) In addition there are responsibilities to:

- 4.1 uphold health and safety standards;
- 4.2 maintain agreed employment rules and contractual obligations;
- 4.3 work according to the agreements of the JNC and Soulbury Committees;

- 4.4 participate in the occupational associations recognised by the employer for the purposes of bargaining and agreeing employment policies and practices;
- 4.5 record transactions honestly on behalf of the employer;
- 4.6 ensure the employer rather than the employee is signatory to key legal documents, e.g. insurances, leases, hiring agreements, etc;
- 4.7 remain accountable to the employer for all work undertaken on their behalf and to report regularly to the employer on this work.

(c) In addition to contractual, health and safety and other legislative responsibilities, the employing organisation and its staff have a particular responsibility to establish, through organised discussion with recognised occupational associations, clear agreements about working conditions and practice. Management responsibilities are arranged between officers and full time staff, full time staff and part time workers and full time staff, or part time staff and volunteers. In this context, the creation of agreements between the employers proper and the staff's representative organisations provides the clearest basis for the fulfilment of different management functions. The extent and nature of delegated powers and responsibilities in every employing organisation should be spelt out and available to all staff and responsible employers. Private and personal arrangements between the employer and individual staff should be discouraged in favour of open, transparent, agreed and collective arrangements.

5. Responsibility to the occupation

Those who work with young people are also accountable to their occupation and have responsibilities to:

- 5.1 belong to and play an active part in the appropriate occupational associations and to abide by the rules and regulations set by those bodies;

- 5.2 ensure occupational quality assurance of work;
- 5.3 share developments in theory and practice through the mechanisms within the occupation;
- 5.4 support the implementation of this Code of Occupational Ethics;
- 5.5 discuss occupational disagreements and concerns and potential breaches of the code openly and honestly with the colleagues concerned in the first instance;
- 5.6 participate in in-service training, identify training needs and assist where appropriate with the supervision, support, training and placement supervision of other colleagues and students.

End Comment - for further consideration

The Youth Service has a long standing ambition to be seen as a 'profession'. One of the characteristics of achieving this status is the setting up of procedures for regulation, complaints and disciplinary action including an appeal/advocacy/support mechanism for Youth Workers under accusation. These procedures would form part of the requirements of a 'Professional Code of Ethics' for the Youth Service. Through the introduction of such procedures, a registration system of 'licence to practise' could be introduced which would also include a process for removing Youth Workers from the register. Such a development has significant implications, including the financing and management of such a scheme. It can be argued that the Youth Service in Wales is not yet at a stage where it would be possible to develop and implement such a process. It would be possible however to introduce a first stage development which would be a register of 'qualified' workers at Youth Support Worker 1, Youth Support Worker 2 or Voluntary Sector equivalent and Professional Youth Worker Qualification Level. This would form the foundation of an incremental development of the Youth Service towards achieving its 'professional status' ambitions. The Education and Training Standards Committee (ETS) Wales may be best placed to manage such a register.