

STATE OF THE VOLUNTARY YOUTH & CHILDREN'S SECTOR REPORT

2024

Produced by
Staffordshire Council of Voluntary
Youth Services
the specialist youth infrastructure
organisation in Staffordshire



SCVYS

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Introduction

This report is in effect chapter three of the story of the recent history of Staffordshire's voluntary youth sector, following on from reports published in 2013 and 2019. So much has happened since chapter two was published including a global pandemic followed by a cost-of-living crisis, major conflicts that feel too close to home and a political environment that can only be described as post-truth. This is illustrated by the way "fake news" becomes truth, whilst evidenced based truths are discarded as unpalatable and discredited as false.

Our society appears to value money and wealth above all else, the divide between the very rich and the poor grows ever larger, and our planet is suffering the legacy of this short-term "take-what-you-can" attitude.

When decisions are made that in order to reduce inflation a hike in interest rates is required, suppressing the housing market and driving up unemployment, we know our system is truly broken. These approaches disproportionately hurt those already most disadvantaged in society, making the poor, poorer, and it can also be blamed for killing off fabulous grassroots voluntary organisations who become overwhelmed with demand and need, and lack the financial support to remain sustainable.

In this report we aim to update the story of Staffordshire's voluntary youth and children's sector, seeking to provide national and local context, and showcasing the astonishing resilience of a sector totally dedicated to supporting local children, young people and families.





National Context

Over the last five years, there has been a raft of promises, announcements and some policy updates from national government which continue to impact the sector including:

- Revised Out of School Settings guidance.
- Updated statutory guidance for local authorities on sufficiency of youth provision.
- Cost of Living responses such as the Holiday Activity & Food Programme and Household Support Fund.
- National Youth Guarantee commitments for 2025
- Targeted funding for specific interventions around youth employment, youth violence, mental health, social action and youth voice.
- The Family Hub agenda (0-19) replacing Children's Centres (0-5)
- Updates to Working Together 2023 and local Safeguarding arrangements, including a lack of clarity as to where and how the local voluntary sector fits in.
- A change of Government in July 2024 for which we are still in transition mode.
- First Labour Government budget in October 2024 has little or no mention of young people other than in relation to education, employment and SEND and additional costs to fund around National Insurance and Living Wage increases.

Despite these announcements, at the frontline it feels as if disinvestment in universal and earliest help provision continues, caused by reductions in public sector funding whilst costs escalate in relation to children's social care. As an example, care placement providers can be very choosy as to who they take on and can virtually charge what they like, knowing that growing numbers of children requiring additional support means every placement could be filled multiple times over.

According to the YMCA England and Wales 2024 report "On the Ropes", disinvestment in youth services nationally since 2010 now stands at over £1.1 Billion, a truly staggering statistic. The capacity pressures are obvious across the whole children, young people and families support system, not helped by the sustained fragmentation of and disconnect between formal and informal education settings and across health and social care.

Any funding that is made available at national level tends to be targeted at a specific issue or cohort, for example youth violence via the Youth Endowment Fund, youth employment via the Youth Futures Foundation, beneficiaries of free school meals via the Holiday Activity and Food Programme or those on the fringes of youth justice via the Turnaround Programme to name just a few.

When Staffordshire as an area is then competing with inner city Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent and more, it is not a surprise that much of this targeted investment passes us by despite high quality applications being submitted.



In addition, Staffordshire has not received national core funding for either our Violence Reduction Alliance or new Family Hubs, and to roll out these nationally required approaches meant a significant reorganisation of public sector staff, and a lot of goodwill from voluntary and community sector partners.

Key factors continue to be identified in programmes that are successful in their lasting impact, including the vital importance of relationships forged by “trusted adults” such as youth workers, responsive programmes that keep the young person/people at the centre, working with and not “doing to”, holistic approaches covering all aspects of personal and social development in a way that doesn’t feel like formal learning, whole-family approaches where relevant, and of course ensuring support is available at the earliest opportunity, before presenting issues become embedded and more complex.

A final key factor is ongoing networks of support that young people can belong to once any intervention is completed. This is the core of what SCVYS members provide and what has been vital to support and protect over the last 10 years.

In terms of capacity-building or Infrastructure support, there is a very messy and varied picture across the nation, with clear tensions that need resolving. Here’s the current scenario; if national organisations get success in their influencing and lobbying, this rarely translates in to support trickling down to local infrastructure and frontline delivery networks.

The national organisations simply get larger and larger but are still unable to provide either the bespoke development support work needed by frontline organisations at a local level or the hyper-local support services required by young people. In most areas there are remnants of the former regional youth work units, who have morphed to survive during the lean times of recent years. Of course, local infrastructure doesn’t exist everywhere which adds to the challenge.

Renaissi and YPFT plan to publish a report around these relationships which clarifies the contributions and responsibilities that need to be held at local, regional and national level.

Case Study



In 2023, SCVYS joined the [Young People’s Foundation Trust \(YPFT\)](#), who are determined to keep the focus on supporting local youth partnerships. These come in many forms, but the key aim is to help the local partners including young people themselves determine what works best for them, and not to impose any kind of one-size-fits-all model.

This is particularly useful in Staffordshire with our huge geography and mixture of rural and urban challenges. SCVYS staff have been able to engage with colleagues across a growing national network, sharing our practice and learning from others in similar roles.

YPFT have also been helpful in commissioning several informative reports such as the aforementioned Renaissi report, as well as guidance for local authorities on local youth partnerships.

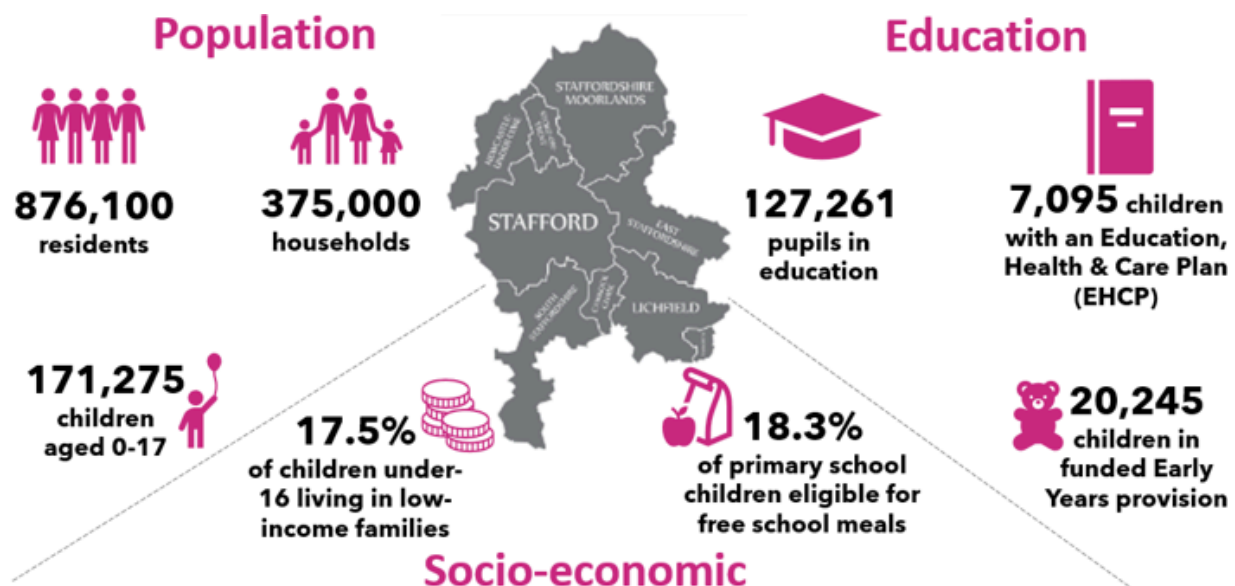


Local Context & Challenges

Staffordshire is a huge county right at the heart of Great Britain. Its greatest length is 90 kilometres from north to south, and extreme width is 60 kilometres from east to west. There is a mix of rural agricultural swathes and medium sized towns built on world-renowned industries such as pottery and beer which contain very deprived wards near more wealthy areas.

Staffordshire is home to several national attractions liked the National Memorial Arboretum and St George's Park, as well as jaw-dropping natural beauty, global brands, and towns and cities steeped in history.

The visual below depicts some of the key demographic and statistical data relating to children and young people in the county from a population, education and socio-economic perspective.



According to official Department for Education statistics, local authority spending on young people's universal services in the West Midlands region equated to £16 per 11-19 year old in 2021-22 (House of Commons Library, 2024, p. 5). Staffordshire ranks in the bottom 10% for spending on youth services across England and Wales.

One of the main mitigating factors to these circumstances has been SCVYS and the amazing contribution of our membership network captured through an annual census which evidences sufficiency and much more besides. More on this later.

Staffordshire public sector partners have been subject to various inspections across Police, Youth Offending, Children's Social Care and SEND in recent years, and most have resulted in a "requires improvement" judgement.



It is clear from local partnership conversations that system capacity is massively stretched for a variety of reasons including lack of funding, staff retention/recruitment issues, overwhelming rising demand, and an increasingly fragmented partnership system both in terms of governance and delivery.

For example, rather than central coordination of services through the local authority, youth services are now delivered largely by hundreds of organisations from the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, and in the education sector delivery sits mainly with a myriad of multi-academy trusts, independent schools and alternative providers.

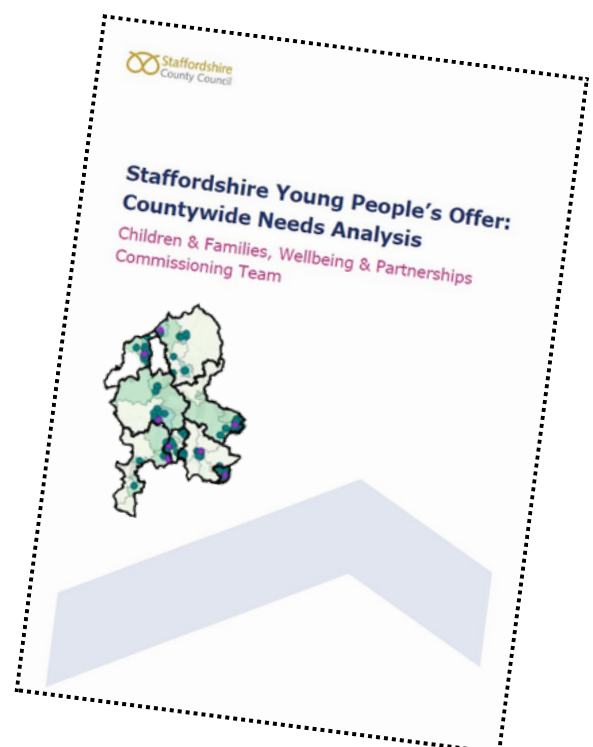
The health sector now comprises the overarching National Health Service overseeing an Integrated Care Board covering two local authority areas, several large health providers delivering both locally and nationally, and primary care networks at a more local level alongside commissioned services again from the VCSE sector, making it an extremely complex, cumbersome and impenetrable system to engage and influence, never mind understand.

We have a local Commissioner for Police, Fire and Crime, overseeing Police and Fire services again covering 2 local authorities, whose community safety remit overlaps with city, county and district councils. The above complexities have resulted in a burdensome set of partnership governance arrangements which suck time and energy away from the frontline delivery of potential solutions.

To more fully understand the local picture around the local support offer for young people, Staffordshire County Council (2024) has compiled a [sufficiency report](#) which can be read [here](#).

The report seeks to identify what support is being delivered matched against the hot spot areas for specific needs and issues. Without SCVYS data and the contribution of our membership network this report would be much slimmer and would present a far more worrying scenario.

The need for more youth support services is rising up the agenda, but funding streams are highly competitive, single issue focused rather than looking at support holistically across a particular geography and are almost always more complex than they need to be.





Contribution of SCVYS

As a specialist local infrastructure organisation, SCVYS is a rare breed. Many of our equivalents across the country have long since folded or merged into a local universal infrastructure body such as a Council for Voluntary Service, subsequently losing their specialism.

SCVYS has 3 core work strands which have their own positive outcomes but also address the fragmentation of the support system by providing a single point of expert knowledge in relation to the local voluntary youth and children's sector, strategically coordinating an intentional approach to hearing children and young people's voice and reconnecting formal and informal education providers through Personal, Social Health and Economic Education support.

Strand 1: Capacity building the strength, safety and sustainability of our 195+ member organisations. They in turn engage 50,094 children and young people (Census 2024) in a range of positive, developmental activity or support.

In the 5 year period from 2019-20 to 2023-24:

- **£23,410,402** of external funding was secured by members, helped in many cases by SCVYS promotion of and signposting to available funds.
- SCVYS processed **2,140** DBS checks for staff and volunteers delivering provision to local children and young people.
- **1,646** free VCSE training places accessed, delivered by or signposted to by SCVYS e.g. First Aid, Food Hygiene, Youth Work skills etc.
- **278** organisational health checks were undertaken focused on identifying members immediate and short term development needs.
- **1,254** people from SCVYS member groups successfully completed Level 1: Safeguarding Children Awareness Course via SSCP.

Strand 2: A growing portfolio of **Youth Engagement** projects including the Cannock Chase Summer War Graves Camp and UK Youth Parliament Programme, supported by Staffordshire Youth Union, a local elected, peer-led youth council and much much more.

Participants in our youth engagement programmes have gone on to lead local youth organisations, become Young Trustees with SCVYS, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust to name but a few.

Three have become locally elected District Councillors, one spoke at COP 26 in Glasgow and at other major international climate change related events enjoying opportunities in the USA and elsewhere.



Strand 3: Since 2021, we have hosted the Staffordshire element of the pan-Staffordshire **Personal, Social, Health, Economic Education Service** supporting formal and informal education settings with the quality and consistency of their delivery. Through this we are seeking to strengthen the relationship between formal and informal education.

In August 2024, SCVYS secured a further 4 years continuation funding for this service, in addition to taking on responsibility for hosting the Stoke-on-Trent Coordinator post. In terms of impact to date:



PSHE Education
STOKE-ON-TRENT & STAFFORDSHIRE

- **75%** of education settings get regular information sent to a named individual, with almost 1,000 recipients in total signed up.
- **Over 50%** of education settings are registered to access the online resource library and including others who've registered the total is over **800**.
- **35** "...& PSHE" professional packs created on various topics supporting confidence, knowledge and consistency.
- **10** Best Practice guides for commissioners, partners and providers again supporting consistency and quality.
- Shared guidance on quality frameworks with Police, Fire and Health colleagues enhancing partner agencies education offer to schools.

Specialist Projects

In addition to our core work, SCVYS have been approached to deliver a range of other projects over the last 5 years, recognising our youth specialism and growing reputation with partners including Staffordshire County Council, Health, District Council's, Violence Reduction Alliance, Staffordshire University and Youth Focus West Midlands. Projects have included:



- **Consultation** – Autism+ Keyworker; Young People's Perceptions of Violence; Moorlands Climate Change.
- **Research & Evaluation** – East Staffordshire (Knife Crime, ASB, Youth Provision); Chase Cultural Education Partnership; UKRI Young Community Researchers.
- **Consultancy** – Early Help Systems Maturity Peer Support
- **Training** – Introduction to Youth Work; Virtual Reality Project; WHAM Plan.
- **Collaborative Working** – East Staffs Community Enabler; Co-production Promise; YPFT Network.

More detail on all our work can be found in our latest **annual report** and on our **website**.



Voice of Children & Young People

As part of our regular youth engagement programmes, SCVYS runs the [UK Youth Parliament](#) scheme in the county, with 4 young people representing their peers. They are supported by an elected, self-governed youth council, called Staffordshire Youth Union, of 21 young people. A further round of elections is running presently, with the aim to reach a council of 40 young people. As part of that we support the Make Your Mark consultation every 2 years, and the following table shows the high-level results from the 2024 ballot. The full results report can be viewed [here](#).



Topic	Staffordshire	West Midlands	UK
Jobs, the Economy & Benefits	744 (1st)	5,356 (3rd)	69,256 (4th)
Culture, Media, Sport	664 (2nd)	5,299 (4th)	69,261 (3rd)
Crime & Safety	656 (3rd)	8,564 (1st)	78,893 (2nd)
Health & Wellbeing	616 (4th)	6,456 (2nd)	85,976 (1st)
Climate Change & the Environment	469 (5th)	3,060 (7th)	49,383 (5th)
Education & Learning	443 (6th)	4,614 (5th)	48,713 (6th)
Rights, Equalities & Democracy	321 (7th)	4,238 (6th)	40,452 (7th)
Transport	284 (8th)	2,508 (8th)	29,849 (8th)
International Relations	180 (9th)	1,440 (10th)	16,693 (10th)
Youth Work & Young People's Services	137 (10th)	2,492 (9th)	24,130 (9th)
TOTAL	4,514	44,027	512,606

The top four topics are consistent across local, regional and national, but in a different order of priority. In recent years Mental Health and Climate Change have received most votes, but perhaps more immediate concerns have pushed climate change to 5th place this time around. Broader themes may also have contributed to this apparent change in priorities for young people. In our other engagement work, young people have also consistently told us they feel disconnected to their community and that they as young people are undervalued.

Staffordshire Youth Union meaningfully engage and represent the voices of children and young people with local, regional and national decision makers. Some things they have been getting involved with include working and collaborating with the:

- Violence Reduction Alliance and Staffordshire Commissioners Office to co-produce the design of a new anti-violence campaign aimed at preventing violence and its harms through better understanding of young people's perceptions and experiences of violence.
- Disability & Neurodiversity Partnership Board to install a youth representative as a member of the board representing the views, lives and experiences of children and young people.
- Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust CYP Mental Health Participation Team to gain a better understanding of the barriers and experiences of young people using mental health services.
- County Council colleagues on the development of the new Local Transport Plan for the county and promoting a new online map to young people alongside a traditional survey, whereby they can identify their local transport issues.
- Audience Agency to include young people's views and experiences in the development of a new Culture Strategy for Staffordshire.
- Staffordshire PSHE Education Service to provide insights into young people's experience of the PSHE curriculum whilst at school.
- Integrated Care Board to develop the scope of a CYP Event Engagement – highlighting some of the biggest health priorities/concerns for young people today and reflecting on relevant local health inequalities statistics.

SYU also ran a successful fundraising event, raising an impressive £201 to support the Special Needs Adventure Playground in Cannock, and they have many more ideas in the pipeline to support local good causes.



My confidence has increased, as I think I lost confidence a bit because of school and when I joined SYU it came back.

I think anyone who is thinking of joining shouldn't hesitate because it does develop you as a person and gives you loads of transferable skills. It helps hearing different views because it assists you in developing your debating skills but also recognising that everyone is different.

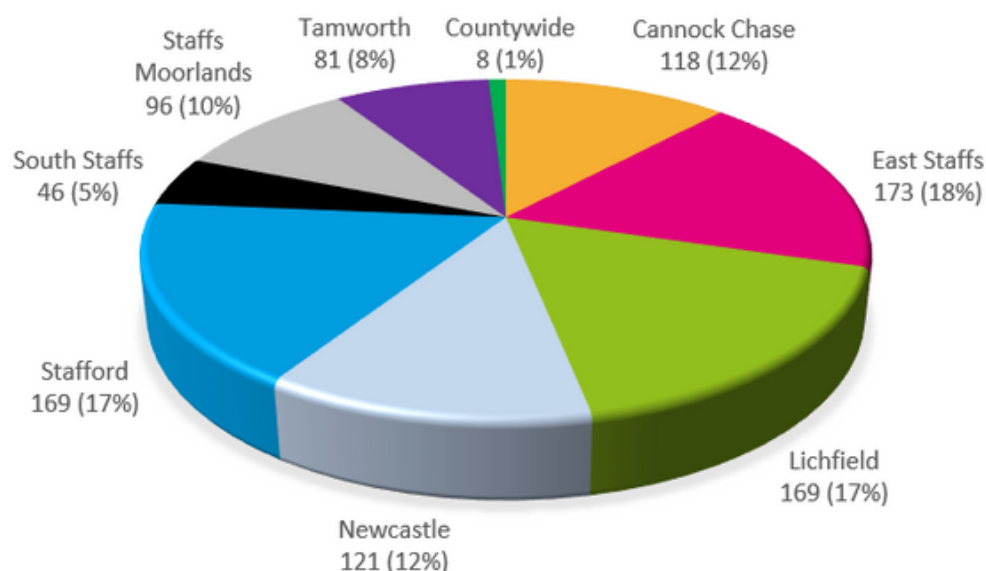
Caitlyn Monks, SYU representative



Composition of the local sector

Geographical Coverage

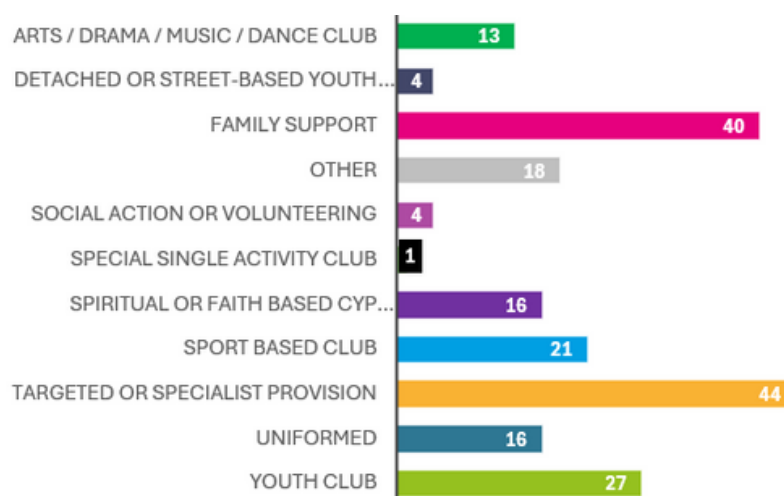
The pie chart below shows the number of units of provision run by SCVYS members in geographic locations at a district level. This indicates higher levels of membership and provision in East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Stafford, whilst the lower represented areas include the Staffordshire Moorlands, Tamworth and South Staffordshire.



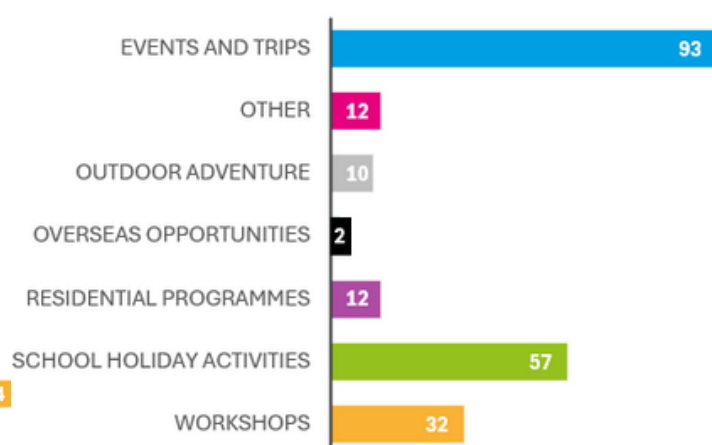
Types of Provision

The charts below show the types of provision SCVYS members deliver. This comprises activity or support delivered on a regular basis (at least once per month) and any occasional types of activity e.g. school holiday activities etc.

Regular



Occasional





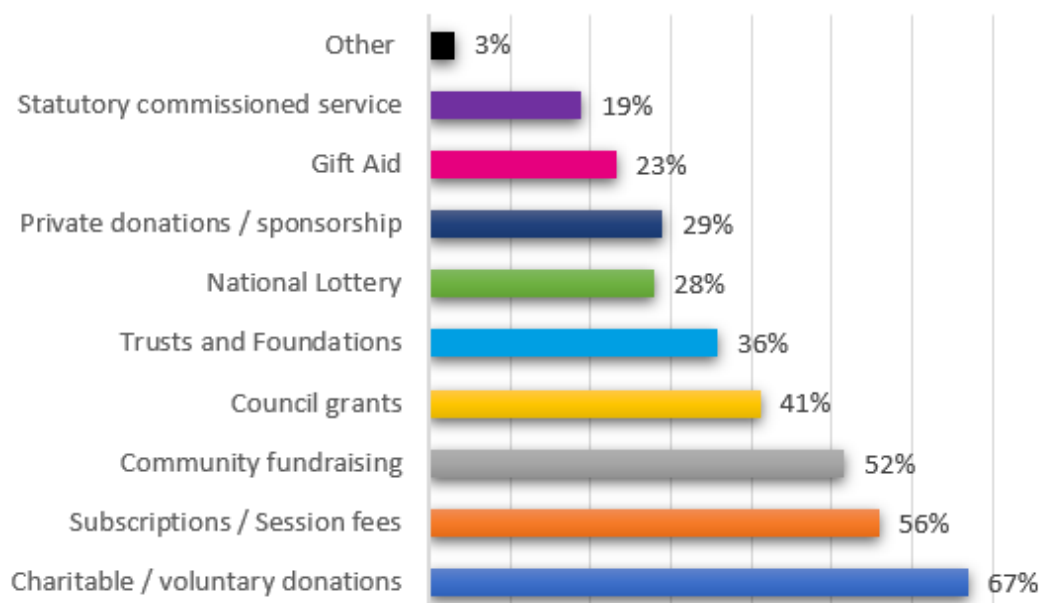
Size & Legal Status

In terms of how SCVYS membership is made up relative to its income and size, the table below shows that the majority (71%) of SCVYS members can be categorised as micro and small organisations, with 34% of these reporting an annual income of £10k or less. Moreover, 61% of our members are registered charities of one kind or another; 24% are unincorporated organisations and 15% are social enterprises.

Income band	Size	No. of organisations	% of all organisations
Less than £1,000	Micro	20	10.53
£1,001 to £10,000	Micro	45	23.68
£10,001 to £50,000	Small	43	22.63
£50,001 to £100,000	Small	27	14.21
£100,001 to £250,000	Medium	32	16.84
£250,001 to £500,000	Medium	14	7.37
£500,001+	Medium/Large	9	4.74
All organisations	Total	190	100%

Income Sources

To enable the delivery of a local VCSE offer to children and young people, SCVYS members rely on a range of income sources as can be seen here:



Over half of members secure their income from the public via a combination of charitable & voluntary donations (67%), subs/session fees (56%) and community fundraising (52%). Just over a third of organisations had secured funding from trusts & foundations (36%) and council grants (41%).





Local sector contribution

Our annual census also enables us to demonstrate the contribution made collectively by SCVYS members in providing positive activities and support to children and young people. This can be highlighted over a 5-year period in the table below:

Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
SCVYS Members	212	215	206	204	201
CYP Participation (aged 0-24)	32,236	18,705	35,641	41,167	50,094
Active Volunteer Roles	9,230	8,423	8,987	9,167	10,333
Value of Volunteer Time*	£18.06m	£17.59m	£18.77m	£19.15m	£22.54m
Paid Roles	606	676	795	889	713

*Calculation based upon Staffordshire median hourly pay (Source: [ONS annual survey of hours and earnings](#)) x 3 hours per week x 46 weeks per year x No. of active roles.

Staffordshire has committed to growing the VCSE market in terms of provision of services relating to support for children and young people. Current examples include:

- The Turnaround Programme funded through the Ministry of Justice and the local Youth Offending Service diverting young people away from the Youth Justice System.
- Family Support Contract funded via Supporting Families. However, moving from 8 district contracts to 3 multi-district areas affected local organisations significantly.
- Alternative Education framework supporting young people outside mainstream education settings.
- Children and Young People's Framework focused on providing SEND support.

It is important that commissioners continue to understand the benefits of local providers who often provide far better value and will usually remain as a community asset long after specific funding streams have been and gone. They are often more trusted, more connected and utilise local people in delivering support.

Procurement and other related departments such as legal and property, also need to recognise and respond to the disproportionate compliance requirements placed on smaller organisations. One local authority officer described the system as “a one-size-fits-all that does not differentiate between Starbucks and a small, local VCSE organisation” as potential providers.

This and overcoming other procurement challenges are even more critical with the imminent arrival of the National Procurement Strategy and single portal for organisations seeking to bid to provide goods, works or services to the public sector whether national or local.



Needs of the local sector

Funding

It will come as no surprise that funding remains the number one need for organisations and the competition to access funding makes it an extremely tough operating environment. In no particular order of significance, here are a few areas we think would make life easier.

- Bring in some proportionality to procurement compliance processes to enable smaller, locally embedded organisations to apply and deliver.
- Fund core costs not just project costs.
- Put in inflationary increases to longer term contracts to avoid the scenario often quoted by voluntary organisations that they end up subsidising public services.
- Due to the cost-of-living increases of recent years, organisations have sought to financially help participants who would otherwise not be able to attend. This adds pressure to the sustainability of organisations in the longer term.
- Fund existing projects and programmes that work rather than demanding innovation or new ideas simply for the sake of it.
- At a national level, consider allocating an area such as Staffordshire an overall sum of funding to preventatively address a range of priority issues, e.g. youth violence, youth unemployment, youth voice, social action, holiday activities, etc. and trust local partners to utilise that funding in the most appropriate way, rather than funding coming down in siloes and involving competitive processes.
- Create an equity of funding support across the country. Locally, the new Violence Reduction Alliance and Family Hubs approach are examples where no additional funding has been allocated to Staffordshire unlike other localities, therefore requiring the reorganisation of existing resources to deliver even more.
- Remember the pandemic, and all the nice words around the local sector's engagement, contribution and involvement in the Covid response, which appear to have been quickly forgotten in the rush to get back to normal.
- Reduce pressures on Local Authorities in terms of rising statutory duties spend on social care and address the challenge of "rigged" markets where private providers can charge extortionate rates for placements due to the market environment.



Volunteers

In Staffordshire the numbers from our annual census appear to be holding up and bucking national trends, but growth is needed to keep pace with accelerating participation levels. Particularly pleasing is the increase in under 18's volunteering in the sector, and this is important to sustain as older volunteers stop being active. Some groups are now placing a greater emphasis on growing their own by supporting the internal development of young leaders.

Scouts and Girlguiding have huge waiting lists for participants due to a lack of adult volunteers. Other organisations such as Home Start have a formal structure to their family mentor volunteer roles and are also struggling to recruit.

Organisations also need to rethink what volunteering looks and feels like in the modern world to make it more appealing and as easy to do as possible.

Sustained campaigns extolling the benefits of volunteering are also required to continually recruit new individuals, and employers and Government need to make it as attractive as possible by supporting people to volunteer.

Access to low cost or free training

For a number of years SCVYS member organisations have struggled to allocate budgets for training. If there is any available it is quickly taken up by compliance requirements around health and safety (e.g. food hygiene, emergency first aid, etc.) leaving little or nothing for continuous personal and professional development.

During and just after Covid, SCVYS was able to secure funding from Staffordshire Community Foundation to help organisations restart well, including providing compliance related training free of charge. For the last 2 years, the SCVYS Board of Trustees has allocated funding from reserves to support member organisations with this recurring cost. In addition to compliance training, SCVYS allocated funds for Introduction to Youth Work, Trauma-Informed practice and Managing Challenging Behaviour training.

SCVYS worked hard to lobby for ongoing free access for the local voluntary and community sector to safeguarding training at all levels through the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and were delighted when this was secured, despite the financial challenges of doing so for local safeguarding partners.





Recruitment

Getting the right people with the necessary skills to run provision isn't easy, especially at a senior level. This has been exacerbated by changes to work patterns and as a result employees are being more selective in their employment choices.

Recruiting qualified youth workers has been an ongoing challenge locally, regionally and nationally since the closure of many local authority youth services. Qualification based training largely disappeared other than a few degree courses. The National Youth Agency (NYA) secured some Government funding for youth work training and utilised regional youth work units to organise and allocate places regionally. 40 people from Staffordshire have benefitted from bursaries linked to this scheme, of which 85% achieved a Level 2 qualification and 15% a Level 3 qualification.

Venues

After a period of indecision and uncertainty, Staffordshire County Council finally stopped the historic funding stream allocated to help voluntary organisations, primarily Scouts and Guides, pay for the use of schools as bases for delivering provision. When these are the only appropriate venue in a community to deliver support to young people from, for example a school in a rural village, then sustaining provision and opportunity can be severely impacted.

Post pandemic, venues also had reduced capacity and additional safety measures for a period of time as everyone took time to adjust to new legal requirements. This meant that hiring costs for venues rose, further exacerbated by fuel cost rises which were passed on by venues to those using them.

Increased Demand and Complexity

Continued escalation in demand across universal and early help, but without the necessary investment. Health, as a sector, is now doing what Local Authorities did 7 years ago in terms of seeing the potential of the voluntary sectors contribution but without the investment to sustain the ongoing impact. We all remember the sticks game, where each player pulls out a stick aiming to leave the remaining structure in place. However, when a stick is pulled that was required to hold things together, the tipping point is reached, with no way back, and we are left with a totally crashed system.

With increased demand and reduced resources, extended waiting lists are inevitable. The problem with waiting is that things don't just stay as they are, but the waiting time brings added complexity and entrenchment of the identified issues, so it takes longer and is harder to get to the root causes and aid recovery.



Becky Mear – Riverside Church

Becky started her youth work role at Riverside Church full of enthusiasm, but without any youth work qualifications to back up her desire to support young people.

Utilising the NYA bursary scheme, Becky, with the support of colleagues at Riverside, was able to complete both Level 2 and Level 3 Youth Work courses during an 18-month time span. This was no mean feat, as Becky hadn't undertaken any formal learning for several years previously and also struggles with dyslexia making written work a real challenge.

Becky said: *"I started the course feeling very unconfident in myself within the role as a youth worker. In doing these courses I realise that I do know what I'm doing. I understand a lot more about young people than I gave myself credit for. I am grateful to my tutor who helped me overcome my dyslexia barriers throughout the course."*

Becky now runs several weekly youth activities both for those linked to the church as well as open sessions for young people from the wider community and works alongside other local organisations such as schools, Burton and South Derbyshire College, Trent and Dove Housing, as well as fellow SCVYS members, Burton Youth For Christ and Eagles Nest Project.

In 2024 Becky was nominated by Riverside Church for a Les Simmons Award in the 'Adult Impact on local young people' category.

Jackson Minor – Fun Club Hub CIO

Jackson is a wonderful example of a young person growing in leadership within their local youth organisation, Fun Club Hub CIO. SCVYS first met Jackson when delivering a young leader training course. Many of those young trainees then went on to do an Introduction to Youth Work course, delivered by SCVYS the following year. When the NYA bursary scheme went live, Jackson took the plunge completing a Level 2 Youth Work qualification, and he has now started his Level 3 award.

Jackson is fully involved in supporting leaders Kerry and Liz in the delivery of Fun Club's weekly youth programmes, taking responsibility for planning activities and building trusting relationships with the participating young people. He has grown in confidence through practical hands-on experience, now backed up with the knowledge and skills to apply the theories of good youth work.

Leaders Liz and Kerry said: *"Recruiting the right kind of youth support workers is tough, so we intentionally decided to grow our own wherever possible. We are continually encouraging participants to start their leadership journeys, and Jackson is a shining example of this personal and social development progression. He has become an incredible asset to the team and a key part of Fun Club supporting all of the young people who come through our doors."*



Conclusion & Recommendations

In this, the current toughest of all operating environments, the risks are clear. Without reinvestment funding, whether through public or philanthropic donations, grants or access to contracts and commissioning opportunities which are valued on a full-cost recovery basis and include inflationary uplifts, the voluntary youth sector marketplace may significantly retract.

VCSE organisations closing is now a more and more common occurrence. If you had announced 3 years ago that sector stalwarts such as the Foundation for Social Improvement, Children England and the British Youth Council would close in 2023-24 not many people would have believed you.

Having not only survived the Covid-19 pandemic, but responded magnificently throughout it, putting the needs of their communities at the heart of all responses, organisations have battled through the cost-of-living crisis where inflation was in double figures for many months. Instead of passing these costs on which would have created further misery and disengagement, organisations protected their participants, absorbing costs, spending reserves and continuing to meet local need often to the detriment of their organisational strength and long-term sustainability.

Doing nothing is not an option. Support for core costs needs to be prioritised, to rebuild strength and sustainability to ensure these local assets are not lost forever. National organisations come and go at a local level as contracts are won or lost. Local organisations if lost rarely rise quickly from the ashes, because they are built on the blood, sweat and tears of local people who care enough to respond to the need that is in front of them.

National Recommendations

A fully funded, long-term National Youth Strategy that:

- Redresses the adverse impact of disinvestment in support services for young people over the last 15 years.
- Puts an inherent value on young people as being critically important to the future of our nation.
- Clarifies the role of local, regional and national infrastructure and ensures that all parts of this complex jigsaw work together collaboratively and effectively with a focus on local, as described in the Young People's Foundation Trust model.
- Provides affordable training and development opportunities for the workforce.
- Promotes the benefits of volunteering with and to young people and supports individual organisations to develop a wider range of volunteer opportunities.



Local Recommendations

- Development and ongoing promotion of a “keep your £ local” scheme e.g. keeping donations, commissioning and everyday purchasing focused on local rather than national brands.
- Ensure the compliance element of commissioning opportunities is proportional and relevant, not the current one-size fits all whether you are Starbucks or a local VCSE group.
- Commit to creating opportunities for local VCSE involvement in delivering services that builds capacity in the local sector.
- Commit to ending the VCSE financially underwriting the public sector through underfunded contracts.
- Public Sector partners must collaborate and co-commission to expand services that are proven to work effectively in response to single presenting issues (i.e. youth justice), enabling them to respond to any presenting issue (i.e. mental health, school exclusion, etc.) by joining up existing funding streams, and thereby creating a responsive universal early intervention offer for young people delivered by trusted local providers.
- Develop a “Staffordshire – a great place to volunteer/contribute” campaign, to encourage volunteering and involvement in local community organisations.
- The use of appropriate venues needs to be maximised, alongside an approach that places a higher value on investment in young people than income generation.

These resonate with the findings published by UK Youth (2024) in their blog entitled “GE2024: What the youth sector wants from the next Government?” The ask included:

- Funding and Investment including workforce development, delivery of a youth offer and youth voice opportunities.
- Strategic Vision and Leadership leading to a joined-up approach across Government outlined in a youth strategy that is fully costed with funding allocated and secured for the generational change that is needed.
- Support around data, research and impact measurement.
- Joined-up Infrastructure at a National, Regional and Local level.

Editors note: The NYA and UK Youth cannot do what SCVYS does at a local level. Equally, SCVYS cannot lobby and influence MPs and the civil service in the way NYA and UK Youth can. Regional bodies also have a role to play e.g. Youth Focus West Midlands recently adopting SCVYS Introduction to Youth Work content so across the region everyone can be assured of the coverage this entry-level training course provides.





References

House of Commons Library (2024) '*Trends in funding levels for youth services*' 26th Feb.

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@staffscvys

SCVYS • Philanthropy House, Priestly Court, Staffordshire Technology Park • Stafford • ST18 0LQ
01785 240378 • www.staffscvys.org.uk • office@staffscvys.org.uk

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