# Detached Youth Work in Brechin High School
# A youth work approach to supporting school attendance and engagement.

## Introduction:

Detached youth work refers to a form of youth work that happens outside of formal, structured environments, often in places where young people naturally gather, such as streets, parks, and other community spaces. When applied within a school setting, detached youth work takes on a unique and adaptive approach, aiming to meet young people where they are both physically and emotionally within the school environment.

Angus Council Vibrant communities' youth work team provide opportunities for young people in communities and school settings. Within Brechin High School, youth workers deliver 1-1 support, issue-based group work, youth work transition interventions and regular health and wellbeing drop-ins.

In 2023/24 Brechin High school was among the poorest attended schools in Angus and often, whilst students were attending school, they were skipping class and wandering around the campus.

Through good relations and partnership working with the Head teacher, Fiona Lawrence we decided to pilot a detached youth work model.

## Key Features of Detached Youth Work within Brechin High School:

1. **Flexibility and Mobility:**
   - Detached youth workers operate without a fixed base or plan, allowing them to be present in various school areas, like corridors, playgrounds, and open spaces. They can engage with students during breaks, lunchtimes, or before and after school.
   - Also, often during classes when students are skipping class and wandering around the school which has become an even bigger issue within the school.
2. **Voluntary Engagement:**
   - The interaction between the youth workers and student is based on voluntary participation. Students are not obligated to engage, which often makes the interactions more genuine and less pressured.
3. **Building Trusting Relationships:**

- o Youth workers focus on building trusting and non-judgmental relationships with young people. This trust can lead to students opening up about issues they might not feel comfortable discussing with teachers or other authority figures.
4. **Addressing Social and Emotional Needs:**
   - o Youth workers can provide support for issues like bullying, mental health concerns, family problems, or substance abuse. They act as an informal, accessible source of support for students who might be struggling.
5. **Mediation and Conflict Resolution:**
   - o Youth workers often play a role in mediating conflicts between students. Their neutral position and established trust can make them effective in helping to resolve disputes and tensions.
6. **Linking to Other Services:**
   - o Youth workers can act as a bridge between students and other support services, such as counselling, mental health resources, or external youth services. They can guide students to the right resources without the formality that might deter some young people.
7. **Promoting Positive Activities:**
   - o By identifying students' interests and needs, youth workers can encourage participation in positive activities, both within and outside the school. This might include after-school clubs, sports, or creative projects.

## Early findings from this pilot suggest that this approach is improving:

- **Accessibility:** Students have access to support within their everyday environment.
- **Early Intervention:** Issues can be identified and addressed early, preventing escalation.
- **Empowerment:** Students feel heard and supported, which can enhance their school experience and personal development.
- **Reduced Barriers:** The informal nature of the engagement can reduce barriers that might exist in more formal settings.
- **Class attendance:** students are supported back into class.

## Challenges:

- **Integration with School Systems:** Balancing the informal nature of detached youth work with the more structured school environment can be challenging.
- **Funding and Resources:** Ensuring adequate funding and resources for detached youth work can be a challenge, especially in schools with limited budgets.
- **Measuring Impact:** The outcomes of detached youth work can be difficult to quantify, making it harder to justify within traditional school metrics.

**Comments from Students:**

*"[The youth workers] help me get back to class."*

*"They calm me down."*

*"They listen to what's going on in my life – they help me."*

*"They support me with other things I can do."*

**Comments from Fiona Lawrence, Head Teacher:**

*"Learners are getting the message that there are lots of adults within the community who care about them and are willing to make time and listen. High Challenge and high support and never giving up is beginning to make inroads into some embedded behaviours and residual mistrust."*

*"Learners have others to speak to, and the school is feeling calmer and more settled. Parents are feeling reassured that there is more informal support available for young people."*

## Conclusion

Detached youth work in Brechin High school offers a unique and valuable approach to supporting young people in their educational environment. By being present, accessible, and responsive, detached youth workers can provide critical support, help address underlying issues and contribute to a more positive school experience for students.

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