



Shetland Islands Council

A strategic approach to youth work and school partnerships

Shetland Islands Council Youth & Employability Services is a key partner in the Children's Service Directorate's strategic equity planning, including as part of the Excellence and Equity Board. This is helping to ensure that youth work is embedded within planned approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap and supporting effective collaboration across education.

Improving attainment in literacy and numeracy

The Bridges Project, part of the Employability Pathway supports young people aged 14-19 from across Shetland. This includes young people who are on the school role but require a different learning environment to enable them to achieve their potential.

Clare Coghill is a teacher based at Bridges. Her post is funded through Strategic Equity Funding to improve attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

"Through our early intervention approach, our work with young people supports them to develop a variety of skills, as well as improving health and wellbeing and raising attainment. The challenges that our young people face include anxiety, ADHD and autism, struggles with mental health and adapting to new diagnoses, family circumstances, breakdowns in relationships, and experience of living in Children and Young People's residential services. The intense nature of these personal challenges faced by young people means that feeling nurtured, accepted and safe are key to success. We develop an agreement between a young person and a youth worker that the young person will take part in a programme of tailored learning and activity, which helps them to reengage in formal learning, supports their transition from school and supports in goal setting for their future."

As a teacher, I support young people through qualifications in communication, numeracy, English and health and wellbeing at National 4, 5 and 6 levels. This is done using a youth work approach, where:

- Young people choose to take part.
- The work begins where the young person is at socially, emotionally and academically.
- The young person is a joint partner in the learning process.

"Wherever possible, learning is linked to student interests and as part of experiential approaches. For example, Talking and Listening assessments have included presentations on Make-Up, The World Cup, CBD Oil, and Fishing in Shetland Lochs. Numeracy is also contextualised whenever there is an opportunity to do this. For example, measuring wood in the workshop for a bench-making project or using area and block size to determine how many blocks are needed as an apprentice bricklayer."

In 2022/23 Bridges supported 69 young people. 100% of those achieving an award through Bridges progressed to a positive destination (further education, paid employment or Bridges Pathways to Employment course).

"There's not enough words to say how thankful I am for everything you all have done for me over this past year and a half. When I first came to Bridges I was at rock bottom. I'd lost all my confidence, suffered with anxiety and panic attacks 24/7, and was losing hope that things could ever get better for me. I was struggling to get out of bed most days, and hardly left the house. I remember the first time I came in to meet with my support worker, I had to take my mam with me as I was SO anxious – I was crying and shaking the whole time, but never once was I made to feel silly or judged, that has been the way throughout my whole time at Bridges. Whenever I was having panic attacks or feeling really anxious, I was always met with unconditional support and that has helped me more than I can say! I love that all my small 'wins' were celebrated, and that I was always made to feel that my thoughts and feelings were valid. I never thought that just over a year later I'd be going to college and even thinking about going to uni someday too! I finally feel like myself again, and you've all played such a massive part in that!"

N6 Communication and Numeracy Student, now Introduction to Social Work Student at Shetland College UHI.

"The partnership working that has developed between the Bridges Project tutor, SIC Youth and Employability Services and UHI Shetland has been very positive and provided the required support to the students to enable them to gain SQA levels 4,5 and 6 Numeracy and Communication qualifications. The current tutor has had great success with the students and has been able to make very effective use of their own personal and life experiences, which have greatly contributed to them achieving their various outcomes. The assessments that have been produced by the students are of a very high standard and the tutor, with verification support from UHI Shetland, has been crucial in making this happen - she has clearly enabled the students to realise their potential. This achievement - and the difference this makes to the students - should not be underestimated."

Andrew Anderson, Head of Section, Community Learning at Shetland College UHI.

Video feedback from young people including: [Nathan](#), [Cheryl](#) and [Jay](#).

[PEF supporting access to community-based youth work](#)

Mark Lawson, Head Teacher at Mid Yell Junior High School, invested Pupil Equity Funding to provide every young person in Yell with the opportunity to access the youth club. This was seen as an important part of building the school community, improving health and wellbeing and tackling inequity across a rural community. Pupil Equity Funding is used to contribute to a minibus, ensuring that a non-stigmatising approach is taken to addressing poverty and rural transport barriers. The club is a vital opportunity for young people to get together outside of school, reducing social isolation and building relationships and skills. Since the introduction of the minibus, participation at the youth club has increased.

[Full video case study.](#)

[PEF supporting access to youth work in school](#)

The Shetland Islands Council Youth & Employability Services work closely with schools to reach a shared understanding of how youth work can contribute to school improvement plans. The Anderson High School works in partnership with the youth work team to support their plans to improve engagement in learning.

The school invested Pupil Equity Funding to enable youth workers to deliver targeted provision for a group of young males who were struggling to engage in a formal setting.

Youth workers plan and deliver a structured programme of learning as part of the pupil's timetable, across a full academic year. This is focused on activities to promote health and wellbeing, including challenging behaviours and supporting positive choices, building relationships and developing a sense of achievement. Youth workers use CfE experiences and outcomes to align learning to the curriculum. They also use the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework to help young people recognise and track their progress and skills development.

In 2023 / 24 four young people participated. These pupils were able to improve their skills in communication, decision making, team work, confidence, relationships and organizing and planning. Since starting their support, the group have attended every single session with youth workers with the exception of one week where all attendees were off due to illness. By having these informal sessions the young people involved have started to attend more school classes, particularly evident on the day the group sessions take place.

Whilst their engagement in formal learning varies, it is a huge positive getting them back into the school building and engaging with staff or support services.

Marnie Harpe, Principal Teacher of the Social, Emotional Support Base said *“The work that our colleagues in Youth and Employability have undertaken with a core group of disengaged young folk has been pivotal to the forward progress we have made in their support. For some of the young people, this time has been the only positive engagement within their week and has been crucial to improving their attendance and extending their network of trusting adult relationships. Moving forward, these relationships will also be crucial to supporting attainment and positive destinations. Working in close partnership with Youth and Employability is helping us to get it right for the young people we support.”* One of the young people said *“spending time with the youth workers is really good, I enjoy getting the time to chat to them about different things”* and another said that the sessions help in giving them *“something to focus on”*.

Currently the staff are working towards linking in the young people with the Ocean Youth Trust and have future plans to engage with [YouthLink Scotland Imagine a Man](#) toolkit focusing on positive masculinity.