

CHAMPIONING
GOOD YOUTH WORK

SINCE

1904

A concise history

THE YOUTH
ASSOCIATION

A Concise History of The Youth Association

The Youth Association is now in its 106th year. We are fortunate to have maintained many valuable records that stretch right back to our foundation; minutes of meetings, annual reports and published accounts. Such records have been used to compile this potted history of the Association.

Beginnings

Our organization came into being on December 9th 1904. The first meeting of the then 'Leeds Girls' Clubs Union' was held at 7 Woodhouse Square (to the rear of Leeds General Infirmary). Representatives of 6 girls' clubs in Leeds met, under the auspices of Chair Dr. Lucy Buckley, to create an organization to emulate the already successful prototypes founded in Birmingham and Bristol. Aware of 26 girls' clubs in Leeds at the time, our founder members stated our initial objectives to be combined and collective effort to provide lectures and classes in cooking, dressmaking and health, an annual competition day for girls and annual 'outings'. It was noted in the minutes that the Bristol Union provided a week's outing during the summer for which the girls paid 15 shillings by weekly instalments. Our Association always saw

The Affiliation Years (1905-1969)

The majority of our history has been characterised by an essentially administrative organizational model designed to meet the needs of affiliated groups. Stable as this sounds, documentation shows that a struggle for survival was frequently the order of the day.

By 1936, we had become the Leeds and District Association of Girls' Clubs and had in turn affiliated to the National Council of Girls' Clubs; clearly, our pioneering work had been replicated many times over around the country by the inter-war years. The Association actively sent delegates to National conference and employed an 'Organizer', the annual salary of whom was £232.17s. 6d.

The Association was a founder member of the Yorkshire Association of Girls' Clubs in 1937. This regional body went on to become the West Riding Association of Girls' Clubs in 1941 (admitting mixed clubs in 1944) and was based in Wakefield.

In 1943, the National Council had opened out to 'mixed' clubs and was exerting pressure on the Association to admit clubs that worked with boys and girls. The Association, then based in Tower Buildings on Albion Street in Leeds, refused the national lead. The Association conceded to allow the boys to join on July 21st 1945 and became the Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs; affiliation was still barred to any club that worked exclusively with boys.

By May 1946 the financial situation was desperate and the Executive considered disbanding. On a 21 to 18 vote the Association continued and 'downgraded' its accommodation to a 'dirty' office above 19 Boar Lane.

Worn down by ongoing financial struggle, the Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs wrote to the trustees of the West Riding Association that they had co-founded to suggest an amalgamation to off-set the effects of the 1947 Education Act.

the potential of residential work:

“Some of the helpers go with the girls and by this means get to know, understand and sympathize with them as would otherwise be impossible.”

On January 16th 1905, the Union changed its name to the 'Leeds Association of Girls' Clubs'. The Association's annual competition day became an immediate success and the driving force behind much of the organization's early development. By March 1909 the Association boasted 18 affiliated clubs whose involvement was serviced by volunteers from an 'Executive Board'.

The amalgamation was completed by 1st April 1948. Our lineage had thus become the West Riding Association of Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs. The creation of the 'statutory' youth service had been funded at the expense of support for existing voluntary organizations such as our own and our response was to amalgamate and re-group.

At the time of the amalgamation, the West Riding Association had been offered the trusteeship of Highfield House, next to the 'Cow and Calf Rocks' on Ilkley Moor. The House had been granted in trust in 1898 to offer holiday accommodation to the 'poor children of the county'. The transfer of the House was completed in 1947 and for a short time, became the home of the newly amalgamated Association, until the base moved to Mount Preston in Leeds in 1954. Highfield House continued to provide residential accommodation for young people up to its closure in 2000.

In 1952 the new Secretary/Organizer of the Association became Gib Johnson. Throughout a successful and tenacious career, Gib remained in his post up to his retirement in 1978. It is in some ways remarkable that only 5 people have held this post from Gib's time to the present.

A confidential report from 1954 on the work done by the Association with affiliated clubs, reveals that of 52 clubs, 31 were within a 10 mile radius of Leeds. The intention at this time was to reduce the number of visits paid by Association staff and to expect a resultant reduction in affiliation. The survey that underpinned the report revealed affiliation services to comprise visiting clubs, giving help and advice, issuing newsletters, providing help in recruiting volunteers, access to Highfield House, costume hire and handicraft services.

In 1957 our name changed again; this time to the West Riding Association of Mixed and Girls' Clubs. Issues of gender specificity had been decided by 21st September 1961, when we again changed our name and re-launched under a new constitution,

becoming the West Riding Association of Youth Clubs (WRAYC). By 1962, WRAYC had adopted accreditation by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, had 64 affiliated clubs and a balance sheet value of £2,656. Affiliation would rise steadily during the 1960s.

On 19th December 1966, WRAYC became a registered charity. Charitable status has continued to the present day, having been

Early Project Development (1969-1984)

Our first identifiable project was the '2-3-6 Project' in Leeds. Centring on postal districts 2, 3 and 6 of Leeds, (areas of particular social and economic disadvantage), the project offered summer and holiday play schemes and year-round recreational and educational opportunities.

In 1972, the Association joined the PHAB (Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied) Scheme of the NAYC. Our local project aimed to encourage joint clubs and holiday training courses for mixed-ability participants. During the same year, the Bradford Association of Youth Clubs merged with WRAYC and affiliation had risen to 85 clubs.

Following the re-organization of local government in 1974, which saw the disappearance of the West Riding, we embarked on our final name change; becoming West Yorkshire Youth Association (WYYA). At the end of 1974/5 financial year, our net value had grown to a post-decimalised £10,276.

Growth Through Project Creation (1984-1999)

Grant support for an affiliate body that did not deliver direct youth services had almost disappeared by the early 1980s. The next 15 years were to be characterised by the development of relatively small local projects, funded by a diversity of charitable and statutory sources. These projects, essentially independent in outlook, contributed to the 'core' costs of WYYA by way of a charge for management and administration.

In April 1984 the BAHTAT Project was launched and immediately doubled the WYYA workforce. BAHTAT aimed to use Highfield to deliver midweek courses to unemployed young people.

In 1985, Geoff Lawler MP replaced Sir Keith Joseph as a Vice-President of WYYA. Geoff has continued his active involvement to the present and is currently our President and a full member of Executive.

The concerns of the then Treasurer, John Nelson, that the liabilities of maintaining WYYA's core represented a risk to Executive members, resulted in WYYA becoming a company limited by guarantee in 1987. During the same year, we launched the GATE Project; an early form of mentoring scheme that aimed to reduce re-offending by young people in the justice system. The GATE Project continued for 3 years.

1988 saw the beginnings of the 'Youth Work into the 90s' project. Funded by the Rank Foundation, the project involved our partnership with fellow associations in South Yorkshire and Humberside in encouraging the development of participative youth

modified to accommodate name and company status changes in March 1988.

In 1969 a distinct phase of organizational development began that continues to this day; the Association launched its own project-based youth work delivery, independent of affiliated clubs.

The end of 1978 saw Gib Johnson retire and Martyn Livermore take over. Affiliation had risen to 138 clubs, WYYA employed 4 people and the 2-3-6 Project ended. Wendy Royffe (then Clarke) joined Executive Committee in 1978; an involvement she would continue for 25 years.

In 1981, building on the experience gained in the 2-3-6 Project, WYYA started an ongoing programme of summer play-schemes around the county. Funded by the Manpower Services Commission, the schemes offered arts, drama, craft, sport and training sessions. By March 1982, WYYA's finances were under some strain. Our accumulated resources on the balance sheet had dropped to £3,704 with a turnover in excess of £16,470 per year. Despite some growth, the funding of WYYA's core administration was becoming increasingly difficult. Martyn Livermore left the Association in early 1983 and was replaced by John Paxton. John's 12 year stay with the Association was to commence with a prolonged period of cost-cutting.

work by training at youth club/unit level. Despite this influx of funding, cost-cutting at 'core' continued as new funding resulted in associated liabilities. Affiliation had grown to 154 clubs, encouraged by the cheap insurance scheme operated by WYYA. Taking a lead in the '90s' Project was a new Executive Member, Alison Curnow; Alison remained a committed member of Executive until 2004.

As WYYA entered the 90s, over 200 clubs were affiliated and the staff team had grown to 15 people. The Rank Foundation funded project had developed into a progressive Youth Arts training course that would be delivered by the Association until 2000, at which point, key elements of the course had been embedded in the curriculum of youth work training at Huddersfield University.

'Youth Work into the 90s' was also responsible for WYYA's adoption in 1991 of the GROW (Giving Real Opportunities to Women) Project in Rotherham. Operating outside of WYYA's geographical and age-related mandate, GROW delivered important support to many women under our auspices. GROW continues to flourish having achieved full independence from WYYA in 2001.

The early 90s saw a plethora of new project developments in an attempt to provide WYYA with some longer-term financial stability. SKRPP was started in 1992, to provide mobile support and guidance to young people in rural Kirklees. Mainly focusing on work with adults, SKRPP has continued to the present time.

The Leeds Drama Umbrella Project (LDUP) was created to offer informal education through drama and the arts. Operating predominantly in Leeds, LDUP pioneered a great deal of innovative arts-based work, including 'Culture Box' a project for black young people using arts media. LDUP became 'the Project' and continues to go from strength to strength.

The Association moved bases from East Ardsley to three small offices in Kettlethorpe Youth Centre, on the outskirts of Wakefield.

Earlier BAHTAT work had ensured that WYVA staff had spent a great deal of time working with homeless young people. The focus of the work moved from Highfield to Kirklees, becoming the Kirklees Nightstop project and later the KAST project, based at Queen Street in Ravensthorpe, near Dewsbury. KAST operated in partnership with Bradford and Northern Housing Association to provide 6-month supported accommodation to vulnerable young people. Always difficult and frequently chaotic, Queen Street closed down its work in 2001.

In April 1994, John Paxton was enticed away by the opportunity to become Principal Youth Officer for Leeds City Council. His successor was Helen Thomson, who continued the task of launching local projects and maintaining a tight rein on expenditure.

The Development Team, recruited in the early 90s to continue delivering a youth work support service for affiliated clubs, had by 1999 become a supplier of craft and sport workshops to a dwindling number of groups. Unable to charge impoverished youth groups a realistic price for their services, the work of the

Development Team became increasingly financially unviable.

Inspired by the work of a group of local community activists in Hebden Bridge, WYVA became the parent organization of the Youth Action Café in 1995. Despite periodic funding crises, Youth Action continues its work and is about to be re-launched.

Early in 1999, WYVA joined the Inroads consortium in Huddersfield as the host of a radical self-build housing programme for young people and a new mentoring and volunteering project based in Dewsbury. The self-build housing was successfully completed in 2001 and the volunteering scheme ran for the full three years of its available funding.

Helen Thomson left WYVA in July 1999 to join the newly formed Yorkshire and Humber Regional Forum as its inaugural Director. Helen was succeeded by Andy Clow in September 1999.

The seeds of financial and organizational crisis that had been growing for some years began to cause disquiet in 1999. Highfield House was becoming a significant financial burden; successive years of losses had accumulated into an overdraft of over £50,000. The nature of the funding of most of WYVA's projects ensured that it was difficult to generate any real surplus or reserves. The pressure to maintain the resourcing of core by charges on projects that was started in the late 1970s, was cracking the Association's foundations. In June 1999, the bank crystallised a bleak financial situation by declaring a right of set-off; essentially stating that all of WYVA's 23 separate bank accounts were one accumulated balance. If the accumulated debt to the bank exceeded operating revenue, the bank had the right to seize all assets and close the Association. It was a time for change.

Simplification, Corporation and Growth (1999-2010)

The changes driven through during 2000-02 were significant. The long-running financial crisis of Highfield House came to a head in July 2000. For three weeks during that summer, WYVA's continued existence was in some doubt. The pressure was relieved when, at the eleventh hour, Highfield House was sold for £215,000 and its debts cleared. The relief was tinged with the sadness of the end of a 100-year era of youth work at Highfield. Plans were immediately made to invest any surplus of sale funds into an operational base for WYVA, to offer some financial stability and the opportunity to improve performance by escaping the cramped conditions of the Kettlethorpe base. The purchase of a Georgian Grade 2 listed office in South Parade, Wakefield was completed in November 2001 and renovations and improvements continued until 2003. Since 2008, the Association has owned outright its base on South Parade, having re-paid a 5-year mortgage that was taken out for its renovation.

Following the thinking of the bank, 22 bank accounts were amalgamated into one account; one account for one organization. A new strategy for development for the whole of WYVA was adopted in November 2001. It sought to generate more of a united corporation and lessen the widely held view that WYVA was an administrative function of several independent projects. Being unable to direct the development of independent projects, while simultaneously being dependent on their financial surpluses to keep the core of WYVA afloat, was deemed to be too risky an organizational form to maintain. Moreover, the new strategy aimed to reduce the range of activity undertaken by WYVA and

to grow the elements of the Association's work that were core competencies and financially viable.

To this end, Queen Street was closed, Highfield sold, GROW given independence and work with Inroads allowed to run the course of its available funding. In their place, new thematically linked forms of work were created.

The Development Team transferred their skills at working with affiliated groups into developing Youthtrain, the accreditation programme that WYVA had first become involved with in 2000. The Association has maintained its delivery of accreditation schemes through the Open College Network to the present day and facilitates the accreditation of many in-house programmes of work and for colleagues in partnering organizations.

The Project in Leeds underwent a dramatic growth pattern during 2001-08 and plans are in place to push this development further. For the past two years, the Project has delivered the Participation strategy for Leeds City Council.

WYVA engaged fully with the government's agenda in creating Connexions Partnerships in the field. In September 2002 WYVA started StreetScene, a detached youth work project in Huddersfield town centre that supports the work of Connexions with the hardest to reach young people. Throughout 2003, WYVA developed a county-wide mobile Connexions service that operated from a range of brand-new vehicles that were designed and built



for the purpose. Despite the disappearance of Connexions as a distinct organizational form, the mobile units have continued to provide invaluable information, advice and guidance to tens of thousands of young people across West Yorkshire. To this day, the mobile service is still operating throughout Leeds and Calderdale as well as supporting innovative youth work and training in South Yorkshire and Wakefield.

Small-scale project work had been replaced by large-scale themed work that was increasingly organized on a departmental basis. The Association began to enjoy comparative financial stability from 2007 onwards: In 1998, our balance sheet showed a value of £67,597, with an annual turnover of £405,359 and a payroll of 30 people, 9 of whom were full-time employees; at the end of 2010 our value had risen to £535k with a turnover of

£1.228m. At the time of writing, our payroll shows 48 employees, 22 of whom are full-time.

During a decade of significant change, there were inevitable costs. Some colleagues of WYVA, employees and trustees alike, who enjoyed many years of working in the independent project culture created by WYVA between 1984 and 1999, did not accept readily the changes that were made nor the environmental and political factors that caused them. Affiliation suffered, despite the shift in 2000 to charge only a token affiliation fee. Affiliated groups in 2004 numbered only 65, well down from the heady heights of over 200 in 1990. The decision was made to concentrate on supporting individual Associates in 2007. The Association is about to recruit its 1000th Associate in 2010.

New Opportunities and a New Name

In 2009, it became increasingly apparent that the Association needed to grow outside of the boundaries of West Yorkshire. Success in attracting substantial funding for the roll-out of detached work into new areas of West Yorkshire, and most notably South Yorkshire, meant that a change of name became necessary. In September 2009 our name changed again to the simple and boundary-free identity of 'The Youth Association'. Our latest strategy to take us through the turbulent times ahead during the next 2 years will focus on the widespread marketing of our new identity and the quality of the work we do.

It is gratifying that the underlying motives and ambitions of our founder members remain the corner stones of our programme; a belief in the value of positive recreation and informal learning, a need to challenge the life-obstacles faced by those young people most disadvantaged in our community and a belief in the power of positive and accredited experience.

Andy Clow