



## FACTSHEET

# TAKE 5: VISIONING TRANSFORMATIVE YOUTH WORK – CELEBRATING, REFLECTING, RESISTING

YouthREX's **Visioning Transformative Youth Work: Collaborative Design Day** on September 6th, 2023, brought together youth sector stakeholders to explore the joys, challenges, and tensions of youth work. The goals were to connect youth workers in an inclusive and supportive environment to imagine the possibilities for solving pressing challenges in the youth sector, and to listen to and learn with one another. Through storytelling and design thinking principles, participants worked together to craft a vision for creative and viable forms of transformative youth work practices.

The special guest for the day was **Dr. Tania de St Croix**, renowned critical youth studies and youth work scholar, author, former youth worker, and professor at King's College London. Here are five key takeaways from Tania's keynote presentation, including illustrative quotes from her research with youth and youth workers:

## 01. STRIVE FOR AN ‘OPEN YOUTH WORK’ MODEL.

*Open youth work* comprises three elements:

- Spaces for informal education that emphasize learning through conversation, activity, and relationships.
- Openness in participation, so that young people can get involved by choice rather than being referred, targeted or compelled.
- Openness in timeframes, content, activities, and intended outcomes.

*“It’s a free space... It’s not like school where you have to go and do set things. It’s more relaxed, I guess. And there’s more of a relationship between the young people and the youth workers... It’s quite spontaneous... Like you can kind of drop your worries, if that makes sense. Just come here, and do something fun, chat with your friends, and have a debate...”*

- Anna-Nina Koduah, Youth

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## 02. TAKE A YOUTH-CENTERED, PRACTICE-INFORMED APPROACH IN BOTH YOUTH WORK AND EVALUATION.

Determining what kind of youth work is funded (or not) through surveillance, reductiveness, disciplining, and a general narrowing of what ‘counts’ as good practice is inherently negative and punitive.

Instead, take a youth-centered, practice-informed approach to both youth work and evaluation, which means:

- Paying critical attention to the policy and politics of youth work.
- Foregrounding the unequal and oppressive contexts in which young people — and practitioners — live their lives.
- Being aware of policy / politics / structural contexts, discussing the dilemmas and tensions, and working collectively with young people and colleagues for change.

*“[Evaluation] used to take up a really long time. And then it would be frustrating cause you wouldn’t be able to be doing your youth work, but you’d be trying to evidence youth work that you didn’t have time to do.”*

- Nora, Youth Worker

### **03. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT, DESPITE A DEEP LOVE OF THEIR WORK, MANY YOUTH WORKERS FEEL FRUSTRATED WITH CURRENT SYSTEMS OF EVALUATION.**

Many youth workers believe evaluation is often bureaucratic, burdensome, not youth-centered, and distracting from the purpose of their work. Filling out evaluation materials is often challenging, overwhelming, intrusive, triggering to participants, and vague on intent, purpose, and audience.

*“Because we see these things all the time and we see so much bad practice... we want to show that there can be a good organization there that really cares about young people. We’re not all about, you know, money and targets, like other organizations are.”*

**- Keiron, Youth Worker**

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### **04. ENCOURAGE YOUTH AND YOUTH WORKERS TO COLLECTIVELY RESIST POLICIES THAT HARM THEIR PROGRAMS.**

Decades of austerity cuts in the United Kingdom between the late 1990s to early 2010s had severe impacts on youth programs across the country. Allowing young people and youth workers to actively participate in movements of “refusals and rebellion” in solidarity with their programs helped illustrate the true power of those programs and the impact they had on young people’s lives.

*“The young people made a campaign and we supported that... The staff and volunteers are not threatened, are not gonna be pushed over... Your threatening my job doesn’t make my principles, or the principles of this place, any different.”*

**- Mickie, Part-Time Youth Worker**

*“Stop cutting our bloody funding, thank you.”*

**- Isaac, Youth**



## 05. RETHINK THE WAYS WE CONDUCT EVALUATION BY SEEKING NEW AVENUES FOR ASSESSING THE TRUE 'VALUE' OF YOUTH PROGRAMS.

Many existing forms of evaluation are punitive and fail to adequately assess the true worth of a youth program.

To begin imagining ways to move beyond traditional evaluation methods, young people and youth workers shared ideas on how they would like their program to be assessed. They came up with the following:

- Group conversation (spontaneous / deliberate; informal / structured).
- Flipchart sheets with questions, post-its, coloured pens.
- Video / audio / photography (diaries, vox pops, snapshots).
- Activities to answer scale / rating questions (e.g. balls in buckets).
- Simple questionnaires or forms (used flexibly, with discussion).
- Anonymous suggestion box.
- 'Speed-dating' conversations between young people and funders.
- Storytelling.
- Staff debriefs and reflection.
- Human thermometer (hands indicate level of enthusiasm / agreement).

*"I had to show what opportunities we give young people. I gave a few examples of concrete things we give them, very concrete tangible things. And then I said, 'But the most important things are the things you can't touch,' and I made a massive emphasis on that because they're so obsessed with bloody targets. So then I sort of made, from the concrete ones, which intangible ones come out of that. And then some comments from the young people."*

- Laura, Part-Time Youth Worker

Learn more:

[Visioning Transformative Youth Work Design Day Story](#)

