

# Re-engaging the Hardest-to-Help Young People: the role of the Neighbourhood Support Fund

National Foundation for Educational Research

Sarah Golden, Thomas Spielhofer, David Sims,  
Sarah Aiston, Lisa O'Donnell

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF), which was launched in September 1999, aims to re-engage disaffected and disengaged young people aged 13 to 19 into education, training or employment. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is providing £60 million over three years to fund over 660 NSF projects in 40 disadvantaged areas in England, with the aim that at least 15,000 young people will participate annually in the NSF. Three Managing Agents deliver NSF through local voluntary and community-based organisations which offer a range of activities and support for young people. The DfES commissioned NFER to undertake research to establish the extent to which the NSF is supporting the re-engagement of young people in education, training, employment or other structured activities. The results reported here are the key findings from the research which was carried out between July 2001 and March 2002. This included an analysis of NSF project management information and case-study visits to 20 projects.

## Key Findings

- ◆ The research found that there was a clear and continuing demand for the services provided by NSF projects from young people whose needs were not being fully met by mainstream education provision.
- ◆ A total of 22,350 young people joined NSF projects since recruitment started in February 2000. Between January and December 2001, the figure of young people registered as having joined was 13,538. This figure indicates a growing momentum of young people participating in the NSF, approaching the annual target figure of 15,000.
- ◆ Around half (51 per cent) of young people who had left NSF projects had moved on to positive outcomes, including education, training, employment, the Learning Gateway, New Deal, and voluntary work.
- ◆ Project staff valued the provision and local targeting of resources and appreciated the way that NSF enabled them to work flexibly within its overall aims to meet the needs of the young people in their communities.
- ◆ The critical factors which contributed to engaging young people in NSF projects included building relationships, gaining their trust, and giving clients a sense of ownership and choice. Projects combined structure with flexibility to meet individual need, provided clients with targets to aim for, and offered practical activities with minimal written work.
- ◆ NSF projects were successfully recruiting young people from the target group of hard-to-reach young people through publicity, outreach and links with other organisations. The majority of clients had some form of

educational disadvantage: around a half had low levels of educational achievement, about a quarter were long-term non-attenders or truants, and around a fifth had been excluded from school. Twenty-one per cent of clients were identified as young offenders or at risk of becoming young offenders.

- ◆ NSF projects were valued by the young people interviewed, and all those who were asked said that they would recommend the experience to others. They appreciated the informal style of delivery, were motivated by the practical, creative and leisure activities offered, and valued the support provided by project staff.
- ◆ Young people and project staff indicated that the gains made by clients from their NSF experiences included improved communication and ICT skills, increased self-confidence, enhanced literacy, improved behaviour, and increased aspirations in relation to education and future career choices.

## **Background**

The NSF is designed to re-engage young people through targeted intervention at the local level. The Fund is managed by three Managing Agents which contract with and support voluntary and community-based organisations to establish and run projects.

The Managing Agents are the Community Development Foundation (CDF) in partnership with the Community Education Development Centre, the Learning Alliance Charities (Community Service Volunteers, NACRO, Rathbone Community Industry, and the YMCA), and the National Youth Agency (NYA).

NSF projects give young people the opportunity to engage in a range of locally delivered activities. Projects aim to help young people to develop their self-esteem, confidence, skills and knowledge, and in doing so, overcome barriers to participation in mainstream education, training and employment opportunities.

## **The research**

The research was commissioned to examine the extent to which the NSF is supporting the re-engagement of young people. The main objectives were to:

- ◆ investigate how the NSF is being received by young people, and identify the critical factors which determine and affect their participation and outcomes
- ◆ ascertain and examine project workers' perceptions of the NSF
- ◆ establish the benefits and value of the programme for the young people who participate.

The research comprised two parts: the analysis of project information on the NSF database (which contains information on project activities and client



characteristics and destinations) and in Managing Agents' quarterly and annual reports; and the analysis of qualitative data collected from case studies of 20 NSF projects.

The case studies included generic projects and those targeted at particular groups of young people, projects working with different age groups and projects offering different types of activities.

Interviews were carried out with 39 staff (project managers and workers) and with 101 young people (60 male and 41 female).

The findings presented in this research report are drawn from both parts of the research.

### **Project details**

- ◆ The NSF database contains details of 665 projects, of which 79 per cent were managed by the CDF, 15 per cent by the NYA, and six per cent by the Learning Alliance.
- ◆ Sixty-nine per cent of projects offered advice, information and counselling to clients. Other common project activities included job-related skills development, recreational and outdoor pursuits, sport, residential activities, and individualised learning programmes.

### **Recruitment methods**

- ◆ More than one quarter (27 per cent) of clients were recruited onto projects by a project worker and 22 per cent were recruited by informal means, including having been told about projects by family or friends, having seen some project publicity, or by self-referral. The third most common method of recruitment (for 11 per cent of clients) was referral by a teacher or a school.
- ◆ Projects also recruited clients through their links with organisations that work with young people, such as the Youth Service, Youth Offending Teams and Connexions.
- ◆ Projects reported that there was continuing demand for the provision they offered and sometimes they did not actively recruit clients when they were operating at full capacity.

### **Client characteristics**

- ◆ More than half of clients (58 per cent) were aged 13-15 when joining projects, and 42 per cent were aged 16 or older.
- ◆ Three-fifths (60 per cent) of clients were male and two-fifths were female. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of clients were classified as white, 14 per cent were black and 13 per cent were Asian or Chinese (the remainder were classified as 'other').

- ♦ The majority of young people recruited were from the target group and had some form of educational disadvantage, including low levels of educational achievement, being long-term non-attenders/truants or being excluded from school.
- ♦ Other common characteristics included 21 per cent of clients who were identified as young offenders or as at risk of becoming young offenders, 15 per cent who had special educational needs and nine per cent who had alcohol/drug dependency problems.
- ♦ According to the young people interviewed in the case studies, non-attendance at school was related to the attitude and approach of teachers, the teaching and learning methods adopted, and problems with other students. They reported feeling angry and lacking confidence and basic skills as a result.
- ♦ Nearly one in five (18 per cent) of 13-15 year old clients had special educational needs. Homelessness was an issue for 14 per cent of those aged 16-19 and 11 per cent of this age group were classified as dependent on drugs or alcohol.
- ♦ Project staff identified a range of challenges and problems faced by the young people they were working with, including fragmented and unstable family backgrounds, behavioural and emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, low aspirations, poor basic and social skills.

### **Initial engagement**

- ♦ In engaging young people in NSF projects, staff identified the need to take time to build a relationship with potential clients and gain their trust. Staff emphasised the importance of designing activities that captivated the interest of the young people. Some projects offered young people the opportunity to sample projects on a 'taster' basis. They also noted that the style of delivery needed to be informal and as unlike school as possible in order to encourage participation. Clients' needs were usually assessed on an ongoing basis.

### **Sustaining involvement**

- ♦ Projects adopted a range of strategies to sustain the involvement of young people who had rejected other forms of learning. These included providing a structure with flexibility and support, working with clients on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, and using a variety of short activities with frequent breaks. They stressed the importance of showing respect to clients and being non-judgemental. Staff also involved clients in taking decisions about provision.

### **Client views**

- ♦ Clients valued the security and support that projects offered them. They found project workers helpful and good at listening to them and

understanding their needs. They appreciated the informal style of delivery and were motivated most by practical, creative and leisure activities.

- ◆ Clients said that they would recommend joining NSF projects to other young people because the projects gave them something useful to do, helped them to make decisions about the future, and gave them the opportunity to meet people.

### **Outcomes**

- ◆ More than one third (35 per cent) of clients who had left NSF projects had moved on to education, training, or employment with training, and a further 16 per cent had gone on to other positive outcomes, including Learning Gateway, New Deal, employment without training or voluntary work.
- ◆ Around one in ten had left for other reasons, including, for example, health reasons, starting a custodial sentence, or to support a family.
- ◆ Clients from ethnic minority groups were more likely than white clients to have moved on to education, training or employment with training.
- ◆ Clients who had spent a month or less on a project were significantly less likely than other clients to have moved on to further learning.
- ◆ Clients with serious personal issues, such as homelessness and alcohol or drug dependency, were less likely than other clients to go on to further learning.
- ◆ Project staff reported that clients were working towards or had achieved a range of qualifications, including the ASDAN Bronze Award, NVQs, Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and the National Youth Achievement Award.
- ◆ Young people and project workers identified a range of other gains made by clients which underpinned their progress and transition. These included enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, increased career aspirations, improved communication and ICT skills, improved literacy, and improved behaviour.

### **Project worker views**

- ◆ Project workers were positive about the overall structure of the NSF which allowed them to work as flexibly as necessary to re-engage young people. They considered that the local targeting of NSF resources was a strength of the programme because it enabled them to respond to young people's needs at appropriate times and locations. Project workers valued the infrastructure of support provided by the Managing Agents which gave them access to advice and guidance.

### **Future developments**

- ◆ There was a high level of commitment among case-study project staff to working with disengaged young people. They identified three main

requirements for sustaining this type of provision: funding, staffing and developing links.

- ◆ Project workers pointed out that the type of work that they undertook with young people, where they had to deal with their often considerable personal problems as well as learning needs, was very labour intensive and required appropriate funding.
- ◆ Projects noted the importance of recruiting and retaining good quality staff who had the right mix of skills required for meeting the needs of a very demanding client group. This was a growing challenge given the increasingly competitive market for workers with these skills.
- ◆ Projects acknowledged that the links they had with local agencies and organisations could be developed further and strengthened. This would enable them to draw more substantially on the resources in the local community in order to recruit and re-engage disaffected young people.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Policy Background

During the 1990s, the issue of the social exclusion of disaffected and disengaged<sup>1</sup> young people became increasingly prominent on policy makers' social, education and skills agendas. The consequences of young people not fully participating in, and making the most of, education, training and employment opportunities were identified by the Social Exclusion Unit:

*...every year some 161,000 young people between 16 and 18 are not involved in any education, training or employment. For the majority these are wasted and frustrating years that lead, inexorably, to lower pay and worse job prospects in later life.<sup>2</sup>*

In response, the government's strategic approach to tackling social exclusion included the funding of the provision of activities and learning experiences which would help to re-engage young people and enable them to develop self-confidence and appropriate skills for the future.

Investing in Young People, a strategy for the education and training of 16–18 year-olds, was launched in 1997 to increase young people's participation in education and training post-16 and raise their levels of achievement and qualifications. The strategy comprised ten measures including New Start which aimed 'to re-engage disaffected young people from 14 upwards in learning, where they have already dropped out or are in danger of doing so'.<sup>3</sup> New Start partnerships were funded to research the scale and causes of disaffection and to develop a strategic approach to the provision of community-based learning activities and support for young people.

The Learning Gateway was introduced in 1999 to provide support and learning opportunities for young people aged 16–18 who are not involved in education, training or employment. It comprises a front end during which needs are assessed and guidance is provided, the continuing support of a Personal Adviser, followed by progression to Life Skills courses or

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<sup>1</sup> Disaffection and disengagement amongst young people takes many forms but is usually associated with a lack of involvement and achievement in education, training or employment. Young people who are likely to become disaffected and disengaged include: those who have been excluded from school, care leavers, teenage parents, young offenders and young people with alcohol/drug-dependency problems.

<sup>2</sup> GREAT BRITAIN. PARLIAMENT. HOUSE OF COMMONS (1999). *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 Year Olds not in Education, Employment or Training. Report by the Social Exclusion Unit* (Cm.4405). London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>3</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1997). *Investing in Young People: a Strategy for the Education and Training of 16–18 Year Olds* (Leaflet). London: DfEE.

mainstream learning and employment options. A multi-agency approach is taken to identifying clients and providing opportunities and activities – partnership working includes the Careers Service, training providers and colleges, and other agencies such as the Youth Service, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and voluntary organisations.

Connexions is the government's new support service for all young people aged 13-19 in England. The service aims to provide integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for this group and to help them make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life. It offers practical help with choosing the right courses and careers, including access to broader personal development through activities such as sport, performing arts and volunteering. It will also provide help and advice on issues such as drug abuse, sexual health and homelessness. Differentiated support will be offered to all young people through personal advisers who will work in a range of settings (schools, colleges, one-stop shops, and community centres) and on an outreach basis.

The Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) was launched in September 1999 and is another key component of the Government's 14–19 strategy which draws together a range of initiatives with the purpose of increasing participation in learning and of helping to improve achievement at different levels of ability. The NSF aims to re-engage disengaged young people aged 13 to 19 into education, training or employment. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is providing £60 million over three years to fund over 650 projects located in 40 local authority target (disadvantaged) areas in England, with the aim that at least 15,000 young people will participate annually in NSF.

The distinctive approach of NSF is to deliver learning and development activities through local voluntary and community-based organisations overseen and supported by three Managing Agents (MAs): the Community Development Foundation (CDF) in partnership with the Community Education Development Centre (CEDC); the Learning Alliance Charities (Community Service Volunteers, NACRO, Rathbone Community Industry, and the YMCA); and the National Youth Agency (NYA).

The policy drive behind NSF was to route intervention directly through local communities drawing on the experience and expertise of community and voluntary organisations. The NSF complements other initiatives by offering young people activities which are designed to establish learning readiness and to support progression into education, training or employment. It seeks to develop new methods of working alongside existing services to explore the best ways of reconnecting young people with the worlds of learning and working.

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) commissioned GHK Economics and Management to undertake an evaluation of the set-up phase (Stage 1) of NSF, which mapped projects including their target groups and the

range of activities provided. DfES commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an evaluation of NSF Stage 2 comprising two parts: a review of Year 1 information and data held in the NSF database and in Managing Agents' reports; and the collection and analysis of qualitative data. An initial report was produced on the first phase of the project.<sup>4</sup> This report presents the findings of both parts of the research, that were undertaken between July 2001 and March 2002.

## 1.2 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the evaluation was to establish the extent to which NSF is supporting the re-engagement of young people in education, training, employment or other structured activities.

The research objectives were to:

- ♦ investigate how the NSF is being received by young people, and identify the critical factors which determine and affect their participation and outcomes;
- ♦ ascertain and examine project workers' perceptions of the NSF;
- ♦ establish the benefits and value of the programme for the young people who participate;
- ♦ identify the lessons learned from projects' experience that can inform the development of good practice in achieving the objectives of the programme for young people;
- ♦ evaluate how far NSF activities are integrated with Connexions and other central and local government initiatives.

## 1.3 Research Methods

The project used two research methods: a desk-study analysis of the NSF database and Managing Agents' reports, and the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The research methods were used to provide in-depth evidence on the research aims and objectives, and to explore three related issues: the re-engagement of young people, the measurement of outcomes, and the identification of good practice.

The review of the NSF database aimed to provide a broad overview of key aspects of the NSF, including project activities, recruitment methods, client characteristics and outcomes. Three quarterly reports and one annual report

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<sup>4</sup> SPIELHOFER, T., O'DONNELL, L., SIMS, D., GOLDEN, S. and AISTON, S. (2001). *Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Support Fund – Stage 2. Emerging Findings* (DfES Research Brief RBX23-01). London: DfES.



from each of the Managing Agents were analysed in order to illustrate the data contained in the NSF database.

Face-to-face interviews were carried out with a DfES official to gain an understanding of the policy background and with representatives of the Managing Agents to draw on their knowledge and experience of working with young people and providing support to NSF projects.

A major strand in the research was a programme of case studies undertaken with 20 NSF projects. The projects were selected in consultation with the Managing Agents. A range of criteria were used to select the projects so the case studies covered both generic and targeted projects, projects working with different age groups, and projects offering different types of activities.

As the CDF manages and supports 79 per cent of NSF projects, more projects were included in the selection from this Managing Agent than the others: 12 were CDF projects, four were Learning Alliance projects, and four were NYA projects. Thirteen of the projects were generic and seven were targeted at particular types of young people (teenage parents, young offenders, deaf young people, young carers, and different ethnic groups including Muslim girls). Whilst the 20 case-study projects could not be fully representative of all NSF projects, they drew on the experience of projects managed and supported by the three Managing Agents and in different geographical locations across the North, Midlands, and South of England.

Visits to the projects were carried out and in-depth interviews were conducted with 39 staff (project managers and workers) and with 101 young people (60 male and 41 female), nearly all on a one-to-one basis. Fifty-three of the young people were aged 13 to 15, and 48 were aged 16 or over. The majority (86) of the young people were currently participating in projects and 15 were leavers. The interviews were recorded, and the tapes were transcribed and used for analysis.

Interviews were also undertaken with six CDF umbrella organisations and four regional advisers to gain a broader perspective on the contribution that NSF makes to the re-engagement of young people.

## **1.4 Structure of the Report**

The report consists of two parts. Part 1 – Review of Management Data and Reports – presents a profile of NSF projects and clients. Part 2 – Case-Study Report – presents findings from the qualitative research, particularly drawing on the case-study interviews. Key findings are presented at the end of each chapter.

The content of chapters is outlined below.

## **Part 1 Review of Management Data and Reports**

- ◆ Chapter 2 provides information on the types of activities offered by NSF projects and examines similarities and differences between Managing Agents' projects. The chapter then identifies the groups of young people targeted by NSF projects and investigates the recruitment methods used. The factors affecting young people's participation in projects are also explored.
- ◆ Chapter 3 presents key data on NSF clients, including their age, sex and ethnicity. The chapter examines clients' background characteristics such as level of educational achievement, homelessness and drug dependency. The chapter concludes by reporting on clients' length of involvement in projects and identifies patterns across the three Managing Agents.
- ◆ Chapter 4 presents data on client outcomes and examines destinations (e.g. education, training and employment) by age group, gender and ethnicity. The relationship between the time clients spend on projects and their destinations is also investigated.

## **Part 2 Case-Study Report**

- ◆ Chapter 5 presents an overview of the context in which the NSF projects operate and the main characteristics of the young people who participate. Details of the experience and training of the project staff are provided.
- ◆ Chapter 6 discusses the approaches used initially to engage young people, including the referral mechanisms adopted, the barriers encountered in the engagement process, and strategies that have been used to overcome these. The chapter concludes by presenting the main lessons learned by projects of engaging young people.
- ◆ Chapter 7 explores the experience of being involved in an NSF project. It documents the main activities that are offered, and discusses the extent to which the young people find these appropriate to their needs. Young people's views of the project staff are also examined. The chapter concludes by presenting the main lessons learned by project staff in providing activities for these young people.
- ◆ Chapter 8 investigates the main outcomes of NSF projects for the young people and explores the extent to which these outcomes are sustained. The projects' approaches to monitoring and evaluating their activities and outcomes, and the challenges encountered, are outlined.
- ◆ Chapter 9 presents project staff's reflections on practice including the sharing of practice and the support they have received from Managing Agents. The key considerations in setting up and running a project and staff's perceptions of future developments and sustainability are described.

The final chapter presents the overall findings from Part 1 and Part 2 of the research and the implications for policy and practice.

The appendix at the end of the report presents the NSF database categories on target audiences, recruitment methods, client characteristics, destinations and project activities.

## PART 1 REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT DATA AND REPORTS

Part 1 of the report presents a broad overview of NSF projects and clients. The information is drawn mainly from the NSF database which contains details of current NSF projects. Information provided in Managing Agents' quarterly and annual reports is also used.

The analysis of the NSF database undertaken in February 2002 found that there were details of 665 NSF projects: 524 (79 per cent) were managed by the CDF, 100 (15 per cent) were managed by the NYA, and 41 (six per cent) were managed by the Learning Alliance.

## 2. NSF PROJECTS

### 2.1 Project Aims

Managing Agents indicated in their reports that the main aims of NSF projects were to re-engage young people in education, training or employment, to develop their self-confidence and skills, to increase their motivation and to raise their aspirations. The CDF highlighted '*promoting better understanding between young people and the community*' as one of the key aims of its projects. Similarly, the Learning Alliance stated that its projects were aimed at '*improving [young people's] ability to lead constructive, law-abiding lives in their community*'. The NYA indicated that its projects aimed to encourage young people to '*respect the values of others*' and to improve their '*knowledge of and connection with available choices and resources*'.

### 2.2 Type of Project Activities

The most common type of project activity was the provision of **advice, information and counselling**. This was indicated as a main or secondary activity by 69 per cent of the 496 projects for which project activities were listed on the NSF database. The next most common activities provided by NSF projects were as follows:

- ♦ job-related skills development (60 per cent of projects);
- ♦ recreational, outdoor pursuits, sport or residential (58 per cent of projects);

- ♦ individualised learning programmes (50 per cent of projects);
- ♦ community health, sex education, and drugs education (48 per cent of projects);
- ♦ ICT (44 per cent of projects);
- ♦ Arts (44 per cent of projects).

Most projects (92 per cent) offered more than one activity.

Very few differences were identified between the types of activities offered by the Managing Agents' projects. For example, the largest proportions of CDF projects (70 per cent) and NYA projects (75 per cent) offered advice, information and counselling. In addition, 56 per cent of CDF projects and Learning Alliance projects offered recreational activities, outdoor pursuits, sport or residential. The main difference between the Managing Agents was that a larger proportion (67 per cent) of Learning Alliance projects offered ICT learning opportunities than projects overall.

Part 2 of the report provides more details of the activities provided by NSF projects.

## 2.3 Project Target Groups

The database contains details of the groups of young people that projects initially aimed to target and recruit (see Chapter 3 for the characteristics of young people actually recruited onto projects). The group targeted by most projects was young people with low levels of school attendance: 80 per cent of the 494 projects that provided details of their main and/or secondary target audiences indicated that they aimed to recruit from this group.

The following types of young people were also targeted by many projects:

- ♦ Disengaged and socially excluded young people (72 per cent of projects);
- ♦ Young people who had been excluded from school (72 per cent of projects);
- ♦ Long-term non-attenders and truants (68 per cent of projects);
- ♦ Young offenders, ex-offenders and ex-prisoners (52 per cent of projects).

Just over one-third (35 per cent) of projects targeted young people in and/or leaving care and one-third targeted those with mental health issues. Around one in five (23 per cent) projects targeted disabled young people.

Young people targeted by relatively few projects included refugees and asylum seekers (16 per cent), lesbian, gay and bisexual young people (13 per cent) and travellers (ten per cent).

The majority (59 per cent) of projects aimed to recruit the full 13 to 19 age range. The remaining projects targeted a variety of different sub-groups within this range.

Managing Agents considered that young people who were severely disaffected were hardest to reach, because it was difficult to make contact with them through traditional referral routes and consequently more time and effort needed to be spent on recruiting them. Other hard-to-reach young people included those who had left school, ethnic minorities, those with learning difficulties, and isolated young women.

## 2.4 Recruitment Methods

The main recruitment method identified was via a **project worker** (27 per cent of clients). The next most common recruitment methods which accounted for 22 per cent of clients were **informal means** such as:

- ♦ being told about the project by family, a neighbour or a friend (eight per cent) or one of the young person's peers acting as project volunteer (six per cent);
- ♦ having seen some project publicity (five per cent);
- ♦ by self-referral, walk-by or chance encounter (three per cent).

The third most common recruitment method was **referral by a teacher or school** which accounted for 11 per cent of clients.

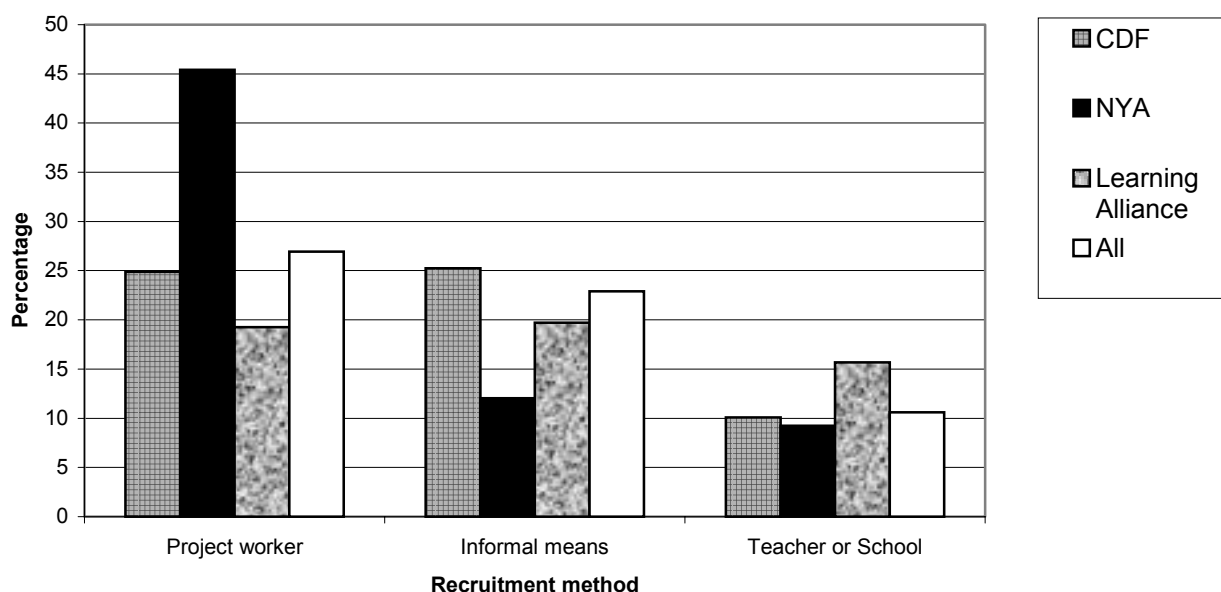
The differences between Managing Agents in terms of the recruitment methods are presented below:

- ♦ **NYA:** a higher proportion of clients were recruited by project workers (45 per cent) and youth workers (11 per cent) than overall (27 per cent and seven per cent respectively). In contrast, considerably lower proportions of clients became involved in projects as a result of project publicity (one per cent) or being told about the project by family, a neighbour or a friend (two per cent) than overall (see figures above). This suggests a greater emphasis on **outreach work** as a means of recruiting clients than for other NSF projects.
- ♦ **Learning Alliance:** a higher proportion of clients were referred onto projects by the Careers Service (13 per cent) and by teachers/schools (16 per cent) than overall (two per cent and 11 per cent respectively). This suggests a greater emphasis on **referrals** as a means of recruiting clients than for other NSF projects.
- ♦ **CDF:** the majority of clients were recruited onto projects by a combination of informal means and outreach work by project staff. Thus, a quarter of clients became involved as a result of being contacted by a project worker, while informal means accounted for the same proportion of clients (25 per cent). The strong reliance on informal means suggests a

more **community-based approach** to client recruitment than for projects of the other Managing Agents.

These differences are further illustrated in Figure 1, which provides a comparison between Managing Agents for the three most common methods of recruitment overall.

**Figure 1. Most common recruitment methods across the Managing Agents**



A total of 22,350 young people joined NSF projects since recruitment started in February 2000. Between January and December 2001, the figure of young people registered as having joined was 13,538. This figure indicates a growing momentum of young people participating in the NSF, approaching the annual figure of 15,000.

## 2.5 Factors affecting participation

Managing Agents identified the following factors as being most likely to ensure young people’s continued participation in projects:

- ◆ the attitude of project workers towards the young people attending;
- ◆ individual attention and support given to each young person;
- ◆ attention given to the range of needs of each young person;
- ◆ involvement of the participants in the choice and development of activities;
- ◆ appeal of project activities to the interests of young people.

Project activities that were highlighted by all three Managing Agents as having proved to be particularly popular with young people included:

- ◆ Projects associated with the **creative arts**, including music, drama and video making. The CDF reported, for example, that *‘creative arts projects are good value for money because young people engage with them immediately, always turn up and are interested’*.
- ◆ Projects involving **leisure- or sports-based activities**, such as go-karting or paintballing. The Learning Alliance found, for example, that *‘participation rates on sports-based activities are high and always attract new young people not engaged in training and education’*. Projects involving high profile sports clubs were found to be particularly successful.
- ◆ **ICT-based courses and activities**, including software applications and web-based activities. The NYA provided feedback from one project, for example, which reported that: *‘The web design course has been popular and the results are particularly exciting. Young people themselves have played a key role in terms of determining what they want to see from the course’*.

However, the CDF cautioned that *‘there is not necessarily a link between types of activities and success. Successful activities come from good groups with good staff’*. Similarly, the NYA emphasised that successful projects depend on the *‘appointment of staff with experience, skills and flair in this area of work’*. These observations highlight the critical role that staff play in the delivery of successful projects which Part 2 of the report examines in more detail.



### Key Findings

- ◆ The NSF database contains details of 665 projects, of which 79 per cent were managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), 15 per cent by the National Youth Agency (NYA) and six per cent by the Learning Alliance Charities (Community Service Volunteers, NACRO, Rathbone CI and the YMCA).
- ◆ The main aims of NSF projects identified by Managing Agents were to re-engage young people in education, training or employment, to develop their self-confidence and skills, to increase their motivation and to raise their aspirations.
- ◆ Sixty-nine per cent of projects offered advice, information and counselling to clients. Other common project activities included job-related skills development, recreational and outdoor activities, and individualised learning programmes.
- ◆ The main groups of young people targeted by 80 per cent of projects were those with low levels of school attendance. Other groups of young people targeted by large numbers of projects included those who had been excluded from school, and young offenders.
- ◆ Overall, more than a quarter of clients (27 per cent) were recruited onto projects by a project worker and 22 per cent were recruited by informal means, including having been told about projects by family or friends, having seen some project publicity, or by self-referral. The third most common method of recruitment was referral by a teacher/school (11 per cent).
- ◆ A total of 22,350 young people joined NSF projects since recruitment started in February 2000. Between January and December 2001, the figure of young people registered as having joined was 13,538. This figure indicates growing momentum of young people participating in the NSF, approaching the annual figure of 15,000.
- ◆ The Managing Agents identified the skills, attitude, and experience of project workers as the main factors ensuring continued participation of clients.
- ◆ Project activities that proved to be particularly popular with young people included those associated with the creative arts and leisure, sports and ICT-based activities.

### **3. NSF CLIENTS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS**

This chapter provides details of the characteristics of young people who have participated and are currently participating in NSF projects and their project involvement. This is based on the analysis of the NSF database, which contained details of 22,350 clients across the three Managing Agents. The majority of young people (76 per cent) were involved in CDF projects, while a smaller proportion were engaged in projects run by the NYA (13 per cent) and the Learning Alliance (11 per cent).

#### **3.1 Age, Sex and Ethnicity of Clients**

Analysis of the NSF database showed that the majority of clients (58 per cent) were aged 13-15 when joining projects and that 42 per cent were aged 16 or older. Within these groupings, the highest proportion of young people were aged 15 (24 per cent), with very similar proportions aged 14 and 16 (19 per cent and 18 per cent respectively). Only five per cent of clients were aged 19. Across Managing Agents, the proportion of clients aged 13-15 was noticeably higher for CDF projects (60 per cent). In contrast, the Learning Alliance had the highest proportion of young people aged 16 or older (55 per cent).

Overall, 60 per cent of clients were male and 40 per cent were female. Across the three Managing Agents, the proportion of males and females was evenly spread between the two age groups (13-15 and 16 and over).

In terms of ethnicity, two-thirds (67 per cent) of clients were classified as 'white', 14 per cent were 'black' and 13 per cent were 'Asian or Chinese'. No details were available of the remaining seven per cent of clients on the database, who were classified as 'other'. Across the Managing Agents, the proportion of white clients was noticeably higher for NYA and Learning Alliance projects (both 74 per cent) than for CDF projects (64 per cent of clients).

#### **3.2 Background Characteristics**

The NSF database currently contains information on the background characteristics for 18,043 NSF clients. Proportions of young people with a particular characteristic, identified in this section, were calculated in relation to this figure rather than the 22,350 clients listed on the database as a whole. It is also important to note that more than one characteristic could be indicated for each young person.

The background characteristics which were most commonly reported in the database referred to different types of **school-related problems**. Fifty-five per cent of clients were categorised as having low levels of educational achievement, 27 per cent as being long-term non-attenders/truants and 18 per cent as currently excluded from school. Other common characteristics included 21 per cent of clients who were identified as young offenders or as at risk of becoming young offenders, 15 per cent who had special educational needs and nine per cent who had alcohol/drug dependency problems. Three per cent of clients listed in the database were disabled.

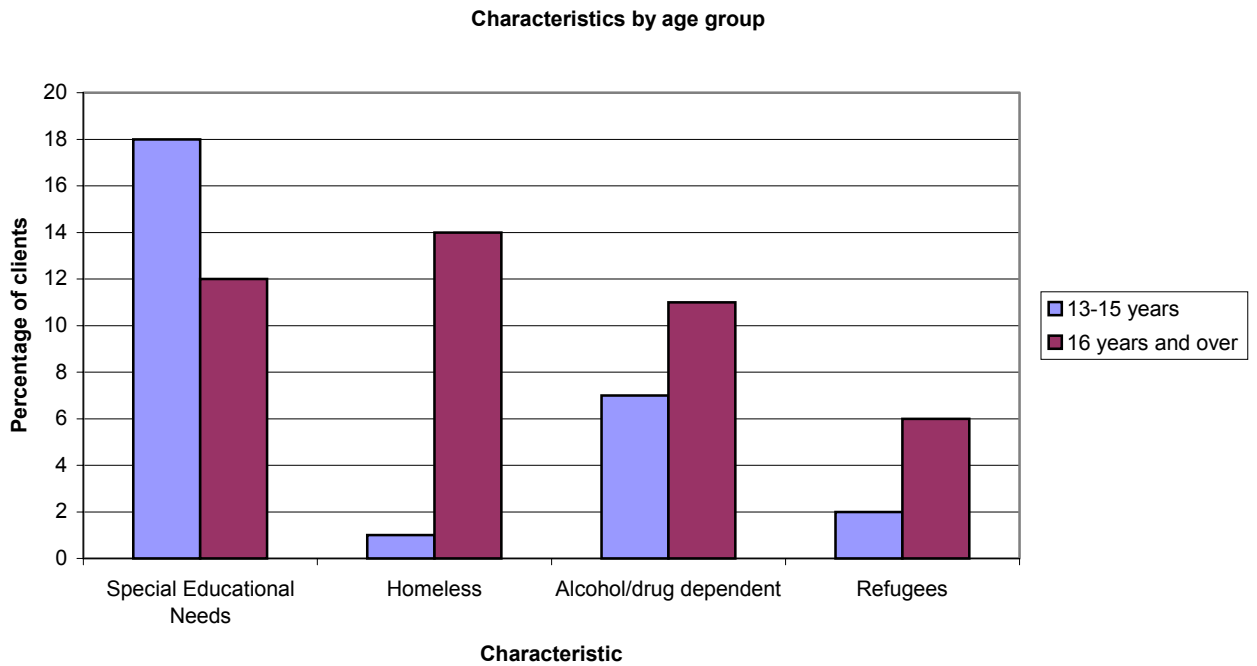
Very few differences were noticeable across the three Managing Agents in terms of clients' background characteristics, although there were a few exceptions:

- ♦ **The Learning Alliance** had a higher proportion of clients who were refugees (ten per cent compared to four per cent overall) and almost none who were disabled (less than one per cent compared to three per cent overall). There was also a smaller proportion of clients with special educational needs than overall (13 per cent compared to 15 per cent).
- ♦ **The NYA** had a particularly high proportion of teenage parents (13 per cent compared to seven per cent overall) and very few refugees (one per cent).
- ♦ **The CDF** had noticeably lower proportions of clients who were teenage parents than the other two Managing Agents (six per cent compared to the NYA who had 13 per cent and the Learning Alliance who had 11 per cent), but had the highest proportion of clients (three per cent) who were disabled.

The NSF database was also analysed to examine whether there were any noticeable differences of clients' background characteristics according to their age group (13-15 or 16 and above), sex and ethnicity. The findings are presented below:

- ♦ **Age group:** most of the differences identified are predictable, such as that a higher proportion of 13-15 year olds were 'excluded from school' and categorised as 'long term non-attenders' and those aged 16 years old or older were more likely to be teenage parents. Figure 2 illustrates the other main differences identified:

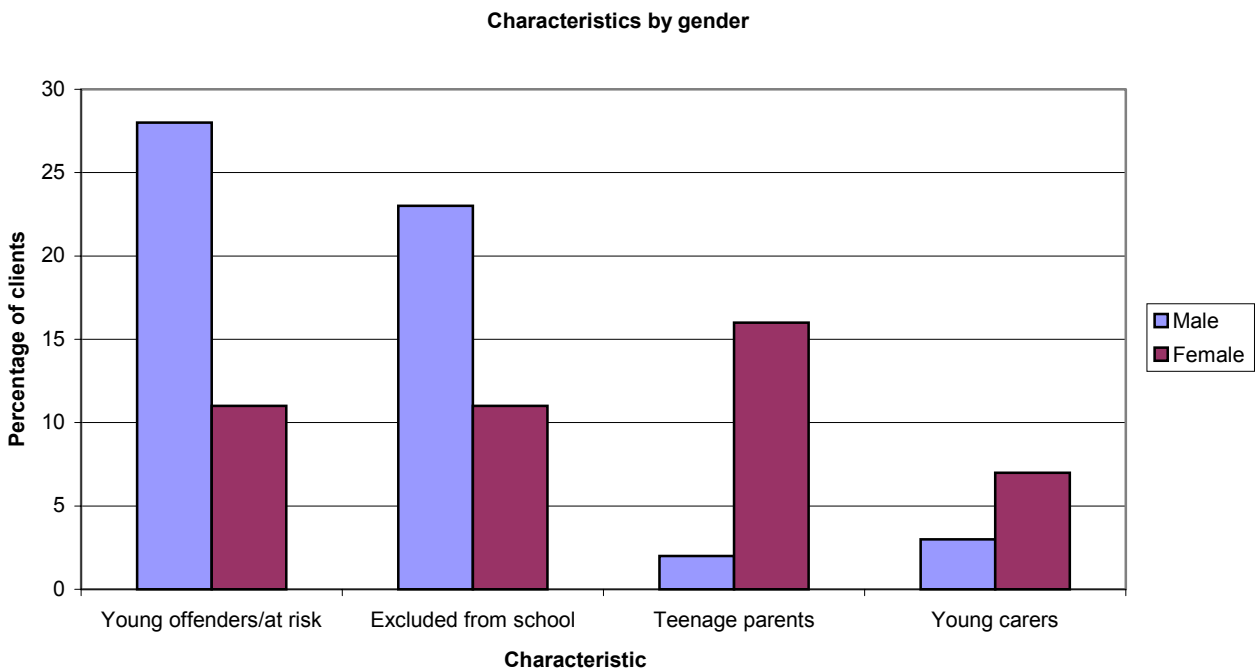
**Figure 2. Differences in client characteristics by age group**



No major differences were identified for other characteristics by age group.

- ◆ **Sex:** The main differences between the characteristics of female and male clients are shown in Figure 3:

**Figure 3. Difference in client characteristics by sex**



The proportion of males and females across the remaining characteristics were broadly comparable.

- ♦ **Ethnicity:** the proportions of clients who were identified as black and white were found to be very similar across most of the characteristics, with only a few exceptions. In contrast, proportions of Asian and Chinese NSF clients tended to be lower across all the characteristics compared to the other two ethnic groupings, with only one exception. This and other noticeable differences are outlined below:
  - A noticeably higher proportion of **Asian and Chinese** (69 per cent) were categorised as having **low levels of school achievement** than overall (55 per cent);
  - **White** clients had the highest proportion of **long-term non-attenders** (31 per cent) compared to 21 per cent among black clients and only 14 per cent among Asian and Chinese clients;
  - **Black** clients were more likely to be **refugees** (11 per cent) than any other ethnic group (four per cent overall).

The database analysis indicates that NSF projects had recruited young people in their target groups identified in Section 2.3.

### 3.3 Length of Project Involvement

Table 1 presents data on the length of time spent by clients on NSF projects across the three Managing Agents. The figures refer to clients who had joined and left the programme and not to those still participating in the programme.

**Table 1. Length of project involvement of leavers across the three Managing Agents**

Managing Agent	0-30 days on project %	31-90 days on project %	91-180 days on project %	More than 180 days on project %	N
CDF	14	31	30	25	4921
NYA	15	30	31	25	1006
Learning Alliance	26	23	30	21	1360
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7287</b>

*Due to rounding errors, percentages may not sum to 100.  
Source: NSF Database, 2002.*

The table shows that overall comparable proportions of clients had stayed on projects for between one and three months (31 to 90 days) and for between three months and half a year (91 to 180 days). Nearly one quarter (24 per cent) had stayed on projects for more than six months (180 days) – the large majority (22 per cent of all clients) had left after having spent between six and 12 months on projects.

Table 1 also shows that the length of time spent by clients on NSF projects managed by the CDF and NYA was comparable. In contrast, the Learning

Alliance had a higher proportion of clients who had spent 30 days or fewer on projects, and had a lower proportion of clients who had spent more than 180 days on projects.

Analysis of the database only identified small differences between the length of project involvement of male and female leavers. Young women were found to have spent slightly longer periods of time on projects than young men: whilst 26 per cent of females had spent more than six months (180 days) on projects, the corresponding figure for males was 23 per cent.

Clients' project involvement was also analysed with reference to their background characteristics. It was found that **clients in and/or leaving care**, **homeless** young people, and **refugees** tended to spend shorter periods of time on projects. For example, while one third (33 per cent) of homeless clients had spent less than a month on projects, the figure for all young people was 17 per cent. Further analysis to examine whether particular types of activities were more likely to keep these types of clients involved for longer revealed no noticeable differences.

**Young carers** and **disabled clients** tended to spend longer on projects than the average. Thus, while a third (33 per cent) of young carers and 36 per cent of disabled clients spent more than 180 days on projects, the figure overall was 24 per cent.

Table 2 provides details of the length of time spent on projects by current participants across the three Managing Agents.

**Table 2. Length of project involvement of current participants across the three Managing Agents**

<b>Managing Agent</b>	<b>0-90 days on project</b>	<b>91-180 days on project</b>	<b>181-365 days on project</b>	<b>More than 365 days on project</b>	<b>N</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	
CDF	7	17	42	34	11975
NYA	8	23	48	22	1902
Learning Alliance	11	27	39	23	1185
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>15062</b>

*Due to rounding errors, percentages may not sum to 100.  
Source: NSF Database, 2002.*

The table shows that three-quarters (75 per cent) of current participants had spent more than six months on projects, with the highest proportion (43 per cent of all clients) having spent between six and 12 months.

Table 2 also supports the findings illustrated in Table 1 above, that Learning Alliance clients spend less time on projects in comparison with young people involved in projects managed by the other two Managing Agents. Over one third of current CDF participants had been involved for more than one year

(365 days) and almost half of NYA clients had spent between six months and one year.

Finally, the main characteristics of NSF clients identified by the database review are reflected in the groups of clients participating in the case-study projects which are described in Part 2 of the report.

### **Key Findings**

- ◆ Three-fifths of clients were male, and two-fifths were female.
- ◆ More than half of clients were aged 13-15 when joining projects, in comparison with 42 per cent who were aged 16 or older.
- ◆ Two-thirds of clients were classified as white.
- ◆ The majority of young people recruited had some form of educational disadvantage, including low levels of educational achievement, being long-term non-attenders/truants, or being excluded from school.
- ◆ Around one in five of 13-15 year-olds had special educational needs.
- ◆ Fourteen per cent of those aged 16-19 were homeless.
- ◆ Eleven per cent of those aged 16-19 were alcohol or drug dependent.
- ◆ More than half of leavers (54 per cent) had spent more than three months involved in projects.
- ◆ Clients in and/or leaving care, homeless young people and refugees tended to spend shorter periods of time on projects than clients overall. In contrast, young carers and disabled clients tended to spend longer periods of time on projects.
- ◆ Three-quarters of current participants had spent more than six months on a project. Forty-three per cent had been involved between six months and one year.

## 4. CLIENT OUTCOMES

This chapter examines the main outcomes of projects as recorded in the NSF database and as reported by the Managing Agents. It presents information on the destinations of leavers from NSF projects in addition to other outcomes.

### 4.1 Client Destinations

Table 3 presents data on client destinations overall and across the three Managing Agents as recorded in the NSF database.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 3. Client destinations**

Destination	CDF %	LA %	NYA %	Total %
Education, training or employment with training	32	38	44	35
Employment without training	5	7	10	6
Local programmes (e.g. New Deal, Learning Gateway)	6	21	11	9
Voluntary work	1	1	<1	1
Other destinations or reasons for leaving	9	10	8	9
Indicated they no longer wish to be assisted	15	8	13	13
Cannot be contacted/moved to an unknown destination	32	16	15	27
<b>N</b>	<b>4921</b>	<b>1360</b>	<b>1006</b>	<b>7287</b>

*Due to rounding errors, percentages may not sum to 100.*

*Source: NSF Database, 2002*

The table shows that the main destinations for clients were as follows:

- ♦ more than one-third (35 per cent) of clients had moved on to education, training or employment with training;
- ♦ just over half (51 per cent) of clients had moved on to some form of further learning or employment (including Local Programmes, education, training or employment with or without training and voluntary work);

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the CDF's own database allows projects to identify more than one destination, while in the NSF database only one destination is recorded.



- ♦ around one tenth of clients left for other reasons (including entering a custodial sentence, leaving the area, supporting a family, leaving for health reasons, pregnancy, ceasing to be eligible, or having died).

The data on clients' destinations were also analysed with reference to clients' age group (13-15 or 16 and above), gender and ethnicity. The findings are presented below:

- ♦ **Age group:** while just over two-fifths (41 per cent) of clients aged 13-15 years old were recorded as having moved on to education, training or employment with training, this was only the case for 29 per cent of those aged 16 or above. Closer analysis of the data revealed the following differences:
  - a third (33 per cent) of 13-15 years old went on to full-time education compared with only 15 per cent of those aged 16 or older. It is worth noting that most 13-15 year olds would still be below the compulsory school-leaving age when leaving projects and would, therefore, be expected to be more likely to return to full-time education.
  - five per cent of those aged 16 or older went on to the Learning Gateway compared with only two per cent of 13-15 year olds.
  - one in ten (ten per cent) of clients aged 16 or older moved on to employment with no training compared with two per cent of the younger age group.<sup>6</sup>
- ♦ **Gender:** no noticeable differences were identified between males and females, with only a slightly higher proportion of males (35 per cent) having moved on to education, training or employment with training than females (34 per cent).
- ♦ **Ethnicity:** the proportion of white clients (31 per cent) moving on to education, training or employment with training was noticeably lower than for the other two ethnic groupings. More than half of Asian and Chinese (51 per cent) and 43 per cent of black clients moved on education, training or employment with training.

Table 4 presents details of the relationship between the time spent on projects and client destinations.

The analysis of destination data indicated that clients who spent less than one month (0-30 days) on projects were statistically significantly less likely to move on to education, training or employment with training and more likely to be categorised as 'cannot be contacted/moved to an unknown destination' than those who were involved for longer periods of time. Furthermore, these clients were slightly more likely than other clients to have moved on to a local programme, such as the Learning Gateway or New Start.

<sup>6</sup> The database contains details of the age of clients when joining projects rather than leaving projects. This means that employment may, for example, be a legitimate destination for a 15 year old joiner who leaves a project a year later.

**Table 4. Relationship between time on project and client destinations**

<b>Destination</b>	<b>0-30 days on project %</b>	<b>31-90 days on project %</b>	<b>91-180 days on project %</b>	<b>More than 180 days on project %</b>
Education, Training or Employment with training	28	37	37	35
Employment without training	4	6	5	8
Local programmes (e.g. New Deal, Learning Gateway)	13	8	8	11
Voluntary work	<1	1	1	<1
Other destinations or reasons for leaving	9	9	10	9
Indicated they no longer wish to be assisted	12	13	15	13
Cannot be contacted/moved to an unknown destination	34	26	26	23
<b>N</b>	<b>1215</b>	<b>2105</b>	<b>2187</b>	<b>1780</b>

*Due to rounding errors, percentages may not sum to 100.*

*Source: NSF Database, 2002.*

The NSF database was also analysed to detect any correlation between types of project activities<sup>7</sup> and destinations.<sup>8</sup> The main results are presented below:

- ♦ Clients on projects that offered **motor-based activities, issues-based curricula, ICT and individual learning programmes** were slightly more likely to have moved on to education, training or employment with training than clients overall.
- ♦ In contrast, clients on projects offering **environmental education and arts, crafts, dance, or drama** were less likely to move on to education, training or employment with training.

The database was also analysed to detect any correlations between characteristics of young people and their destinations. The results are presented below:

- ♦ Young people with **serious personal issues**, including homelessness and alcohol or drug dependency, were less likely to go on to education, training or employment with training than other clients. In particular, ten

<sup>7</sup> The data was analysed with reference to only those 5,404 clients who had left and who were involved in projects for which main and/or secondary activities were specified in the NSF database.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the database does not record the types of activities that each client was involved in. Instead, it is only possible to determine that a client was involved in a project which offered a particular activity, but not that the client took part in that activity.

per cent of homeless young people went on to such an outcome compared with 35 per cent of clients overall.

- ◆ Only around one quarter of **travellers** (22 per cent) and **clients in and/or leaving care** (27 per cent) were found to have moved on to education, training or employment with training.
- ◆ **Teenage parents** were less likely than their peers to have moved on to education, training or employment with training (25 per cent). Instead, as may be expected, seven per cent were registered as having left to support a family and nine per cent were categorised as having left due to pregnancy.
- ◆ Particularly successful outcomes were identified for **refugees/asylum seekers, disabled clients, clients with special educational needs and young carers**. More than half (53 per cent) of refugees/asylum seekers went on to education, training or employment with training, and around two-fifths of the other three types of clients did so.
- ◆ The proportion of clients with **mental health issues** (22 per cent) who had left projects indicating that they no longer wanted to be assisted was higher than for young people overall (13 per cent). In contrast, the figure for refugees/asylum seekers was as low as four per cent.

Further analysis was carried out in order to explore whether projects offering particular types of activities were more likely to ensure positive outcomes for those types of clients who tended to be the ones least likely to move on to education, training or employment with training (homeless clients, young parents, clients in and/or leaving care, travellers, and alcohol or drug dependent clients). The analysis suggested that, while overall one quarter of these types of clients move on to education, training or employment with training, the proportion is higher for clients involved in projects offering motor-based activities (31 per cent), individualised learning programmes and voluntary work (both 29 per cent).

These findings suggest that young people with certain serious personal issues were less likely to progress on to further learning than other young people. It is possible that such clients may not be ready to progress on to education, training or employment with training but may still gain other valuable outcomes from participating in NSF projects. Another interpretation is that some young people, such as refugees and carers, who face and are perhaps motivated by different types of challenges, some external in origin, are more likely to move on to mainstream options.

Part 2 of the report examines the outcomes of NSF projects in more detail from the perspectives of both project workers and clients.

### Key Findings

- ◆ More than a third (35 per cent) of young people who had left NSF projects had moved on to education, training or employment with training.
- ◆ Around one in ten had gone on to a local programme, including the Learning Gateway or the New Deal.
- ◆ Around one in ten had left for other reasons, including, for example, for health reasons, entering a custodial sentence or to support a family.
- ◆ While 41 per cent of clients aged 13-15 years old had moved on to education, training or employment with training, only 29 per cent of those aged 16 did so.
- ◆ Black and Asian clients were more likely than white clients to have moved on to education, training, or employment with training.
- ◆ There were no marked differences in the outcomes of males and females, although a slightly higher proportion of males had moved on to further learning.
- ◆ Clients who spent one month or less on a project were significantly less likely to have moved on to further learning than other clients.
- ◆ Young people with serious personal issues, such as homelessness and alcohol or drug dependency, were less likely to go on to further learning than other clients.



## PART 2 CASE-STUDY REPORT

Part 2 of the report presents the findings from the case studies undertaken of 20 NSF projects. It complements Part 1 by providing an in-depth exploration of the processes of re-engaging disaffected young people.

# 5. BACKGROUND TO NSF PROJECTS AND PARTICIPANTS

## 5.1 Local Context and Provision

This section describes the local context in which NSF projects work and, where relevant, highlights the challenges that the local context can present in engaging and re-engaging young people. The provision available for young people in the areas where NSF projects have been introduced is also discussed.

### 5.1.1 Local context

All of the NSF projects visited were located in **deprived** and **disadvantaged areas**. Employment opportunities in some areas were poor and there was often a lack of jobs for young people. Many of the areas had multiple generational **unemployment**. Perhaps as a consequence, many young people living in these areas had little motivation to stay in education and had **low aspirations for the future**. One project worker described the situation as ‘*a number of young people who I am in contact with whose hopes are to be able to draw benefits from the State...the parents’ hopes are the same*’. Raising the aspirations of young people in local contexts and cultures where aspirations are limited presented a particular challenge to many NSF projects.

Many of the young people who were involved in NSF projects lived in areas where there was a **high level of crime and substance misuse**. One young person’s remark that ‘*it is too rough to go out*’ exemplifies the resulting social constraints. In many areas, there was also a **lack of local resources and amenities** that young people could, or would, access in their free time. The experience of many of the interviewees can be summed up in the comments of one young person who said that ‘*I don’t get up ’til about four ’cos there ain’t no point*’, and who indicated that time was spent ‘*laying in bed or laying on the settee watching telly*’. One young man observed that ‘*there’s no facilities for my age people and older than me, there’s no facilities like that*’.

Consequently, some of the young interviewees reported that they spent their time *'on the streets'*, often *'getting into trouble'* and *'getting up to no good'*. One young man commented that he would spend his time *'pinching cars with me mates, showing off, getting arrested'*, and a small proportion chose to mention that they had been arrested or had been to court or were young offenders. In addition to becoming involved in crime, some interviewees reported that they, or their peers, would *'go out and smoke weed and things'* and *'sit around drinking'*.

Many NSF projects had encountered **negative attitudes from the local community** towards the young people with whom they were working. About a quarter of project workers perceived a lack of respect towards the young people from statutory agencies and the community, and emphasised that the young people were often labelled as bad. One interviewee noted that the local community is *'so quick to judge these young people and say that they come from bad homes and that is not the case – they don't'*. One project revealed that, as well as trying to engage and re-engage the young people, it had to represent the interests of young people in the local community and attempt to change people's perceptions of them.

As a result of these negative attitudes from adults in the local community, and the direct experiences that many young people had had with statutory agencies, they tended to be **reluctant to trust other adults**, a factor that some projects found to be a barrier in engaging them, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The research found that some people in the local community also had **negative perceptions of NSF projects**. For example, one project worker highlighted the difficulties experienced where parents did not want their children to attend a project aimed at helping disaffected young people because of the perceived stigma. Several projects pointed out that they needed more support and recognition from the local community to enable them to work more successfully with the young people. One project manager, for instance, reported that *'we would like to be recognised for what we're actually doing with the young people in the community'*.

### 5.1.2 Local provision

Around half of the project workers reported that statutory agencies and other voluntary organisations worked with disaffected young people in the area before the introduction of the NSF. However, nearly a third thought that there was a **gap in the provision** for young people. As one project worker emphasised: *'these "so called" agencies were just not reaching out to [the young people] in the way that they needed to be reached'*. Half of the project workers reported that a number of the young people attending their NSF projects had already had contact with other agencies and organisations, but that these agencies had been unable to engage them fully and give them the support they required. One project manager described how the young people *'have been through most agencies – Social Services, Education and Welfare, Probation – and they are here now because the other agencies have failed'*.

More than half of the project staff reported that this lack of appropriate provision for young people was the main motivating factor for setting up an NSF project: they wanted to help young people who were not receiving the support they needed. Staff reported that the NSF project had less bureaucracy than the statutory agencies and could therefore be more responsive and flexible. Moreover, the fact that, in some instances, the project was developed by the community to meet the needs of young people within that community set it apart from other local provision. Several project workers explained that their NSF projects had had to find **new approaches** to working with disaffected young people. One CDF Regional Adviser was of the opinion that NSF projects had achieved this, saying that *'there are lots of organisations doing similar things, but NSF projects are more focused on the young people's needs and are more specialised for people from similar backgrounds...the programmes that NSF projects offer are more focused and directed at young people's needs'*. Furthermore, some project staff reported that the NSF project differed from other provision because it did not exclude challenging young people.

In some cases, this new approach to working with young people had caused **conflict** in areas where there were statutory agencies already working with young people. About a fifth of project workers indicated that they had received a negative reaction from other agencies and organisations because NSF projects were attempting to work in a new way with young people in areas where these agencies had already been working for many years. One project manager explained that, *'what I have deduced that has been a difficulty, is the fact that as an organisation we are...tapping into an area where neighbourhood workers have already established themselves. We are coming to the fore with a new way in which to work with young people, a different way in which to communicate with young people and more importantly, a hands-on approach to wanting to create change'*. Another project worker reported that other agencies considered NSF projects to be duplicating the work that they were doing with young people, and that NSF projects were, therefore, surplus to requirements. She perceived that the attitude from statutory agencies was *'our young people have got social workers, key workers, they're getting Personal Advisers through the Connexions Service – why do they need you?'*

Three projects reported that statutory agencies were **reluctant to share information** about young people, and to refer young people on to NSF projects. One project manager observed that, *'I think we have competitors...because we are not part of the council organisation, we're seen as an outsider'*. Another manager said that his project was in competition with other programmes such as the Learning Gateway. He reported that many young people over 16 years of age were reluctant to join NSF projects because there was no financial incentive, whereas they could receive money if they were on programmes like the Learning Gateway.

One project worker pointed out that, although there were sufficient agencies specialising in providing support to specific groups of young people, such as



those in the refugee community, there needed to be a service available that targeted all disaffected young people. Consequently, he had set up a more generic NSF project that was open to all young people in the local area who had become disengaged from education.

In a few areas, project staff noted the **paucity of appropriate provision** available for young people. A representative of a CDF umbrella organisation reported that *'there was nothing like NSF here before'*, and one project worker pointed out that there was *'not another training provider in the area'*. A CDF Regional Adviser stated that *'there are virtually no statutory services provided by the LEA'* for young people aged 16 and over. These findings indicate that there is a gap in provision for young people in some areas, which the NSF is seeking to fill.

## 5.2 Characteristics of Young People

This section presents an outline of the characteristics, attitudes and experiences of the young people who were interviewed for the research. It should be noted that their comments reflect the young people's concerns and priorities which emerged during the interviews rather than their responses to direct questions. As such, their experiences provide an insight into the nature of the client group who are targeted by NSF projects. A broader overview of the characteristics of the young people with whom they were working, which was provided by the project managers and workers, is also provided.

### 5.2.1 Characteristics of the interviewees

A notable feature of their lives, which around half of the young people who participated in the interviews chose to mention, was their negative experience of, and attitude towards, school. A large number of the young people had either been excluded permanently or temporarily from school or were at risk of exclusion. Furthermore, many had excluded themselves or were persistent truants. A variety of reasons for non-attendance at school were provided by the young people which broadly related to:

- ◆ the attitude and approach of teachers;
- ◆ the teaching and learning methods adopted;
- ◆ problems with other students.

These are explored in more detail below.

Many of the young people whose experience of school had been negative cited the **attitude and approach of teachers**. Teachers were described by some as *'nasty'*, *'horrible'* and as *'too strict'*, and *'they would just go on and on at you'*. However, the main complaint was that teachers *'treat you like children'*, or *'you get treated like you are in a primary school, not teaching us how to be or act like a teenager'*. One young interviewee felt that teachers *'talked to you*

*like a piece of dirt*'. The response of the young people was often *'I just didn't like it so I didn't go'*.

The **teaching and learning methods** adopted were a further reason for non-attendance for some interviewees. One young man explained that:

*...what the teachers were teaching me goes in one ear and out the other... other people have different ways of learning and my way of learning ain't copying off a board or out of a book. My learning is more practical. If someone shows me how to do it, I will be able to go and do it myself. Some people like reading and writing and spelling and that. But it just ain't for me.*

In the experience of some of the young people, teachers did not have the time to give them when they needed help and they felt pressured to complete the work. As one young man said *'I couldn't do the work and they'd try and rush you. I just used to go off it...smashed the tables'*. Another interviewee remarked that:

*Because you are young, they [teachers] talk down to you and say that you are stupid – that gets me upset and I can't have a one-to-one. They speak to the whole class and if you put up your hand you're going to get shouted at because they are tired of explaining the work over again, so they don't really show you any one-to-one or anything. When I asked them for help, they don't want to help you, just give you a detention.*

Other young people were also reluctant to ask for help; as one said, *'If I am in school, I don't put my hand up because I am embarrassed if I can't do something'*. A related concern for some young people was the number of other students in a group, which inhibited them. One interviewee stated that he had not liked schools because he *'didn't like groups – because there's about 30 people in a group...I told them I don't like big groups'*.

Some of the young NSF clients who were interviewed had experienced more specific problems with individual **other students**. A few had experienced bullying, for example the young woman who had attended a number of schools but *'more or less every school I go to, I've got someone after me...they don't just pick on me, they batter me'*. The consequence of bullying for another young man was that *'it used to make me kick off really bad'*.

This experience of school had a range of **consequences** for the young people who were interviewed. Their perceptions and experiences of their teachers led some of them to be *'rude'* to their teachers and to not *'show them any respect or anything'*. In some cases, the young people reported that they were angry or aggressive. For example, one young man said that *'going to school five days a week gets you kind of stressed...I just used to lose my temper and flip all the time...my temper just flips and I can't remember anything. The people tell me and I say "I didn't do that, I can't remember doing that", but I must have'*. Other young people said that they were *'shy'* or *'wouldn't talk to anybody'* and lacked confidence. A further consequence of their negative

school experience was that some of the young people lacked basic skills, particularly literacy skills, although they were sometimes reluctant to inform anyone of this. One young man said that he *'wouldn't even think of going up and asking for reading lessons. I would be too embarrassed to say I can't read. And I can't read to save my life seriously'*.

Other characteristics of the young people interviewed were influential in their lives and, in some cases, made them eligible for support through the NSF projects. A number of the young interviewees were **young parents**, most often young mothers. Lack of childcare facilities often led to particular constraints on the opportunities which they could access and progress on to. Moreover, in some cases, the interviewees had experienced negative attitudes from other people, as one young woman explained: *'Some people would look at you and think "oh, you're young and you're pregnant".'* The young mothers were sometimes striving to overcome the notion that *"oh, you're young, you're going to have a baby, life's going to be over"*. Other young people were **young carers** who also faced constraints on the extent to which they could access opportunities. Some young women from the Muslim community said that they were also constrained, to some extent, by their **family and cultural backgrounds**. For example, one explained that *'for us girls, we're not allowed out much, I'm not the only one, I've got a few relatives out there and they've been from strict families...and are not allowed to carry on...education'*, and another commented that her parents *'don't want us to go anywhere further from home, they don't want us to start education'*.

### 5.2.2 Project managers' and workers' views of the characteristics of young people

Although a number of the project managers and workers emphasised that *'we do treat everybody as an individual'* and that the young people with whom they worked *'don't fit into boxes'*, they were able to provide an overview of the characteristics of the young NSF clients. Their observations provide an insight into the experiences and lives of this client group and their responses and reactions to their situations.

More than half of the project managers and workers highlighted the typically *'fragmented'* and *'unstable'* **family backgrounds** of the young people. In some cases, there were instances of abuse and family breakdown and some young clients were *'sleeping rough'* or in care. More generally, however, poor parenting and neglect were widely mentioned as a feature of the lives of these young people. One project manager outlined the effect of *'mums and dads not getting them up in the morning – letting them lie in, and they turn up here absolutely knackered and the parents are out and not bothered what they are doing. That's a really big reason why they don't go to school'*.

Some of the interviewees mentioned particularly that some young clients were not receiving basic care from their families. As one explained:

*He wasn't being fed. There was never any bread in the house...He will have no breakfast, he will have no dinner unless we feed him...They have*

*got mobile phones, they have got drugs. They have got cigarettes to a degree and they drink. But they have no food. Barely any clothes. We have to feed them. No clothes, no food, no nothing.*

Indeed, one project manager highlighted the fact that some young people had ‘responsibility for the parents who have problems’. An alternative source of distress to many of these young people, was bereavement. One manager noted that:

*90 per cent of our young people had, at some point, experienced bereavement from a very significant person in their lives, either a parent or a sibling or a carer, and in quite tragic circumstances...They’ve never been offered any support, counselling or help or anything else...they’re told to get on and be strong for the people round them.*

A feature of the young people who participated in NSF projects, which was noted by around a quarter of the project staff, was their **marginalisation** in society, and amongst their families and peers. One project manager observed that his clients ‘are separated from their peer group, they are separated from families, from society and communities’. Another noted the effect of not attending school on young people’s isolation when she commented that ‘they are so marginalised in a sense, because, if they have been out of school, they don’t have such a big friendship group’. These young people’s alienation from others in society was summed up by one project manager who said that they were:

*young people who have developed a skill for walking their life’s road without any care for man, woman or child. I mean by that that they have drifted, and drifted to the point where they have developed their own life skills, their own safety net, but sadly that does not involve having respect and thought and compassion for other members of the community irrespective of their cultural base.*

The comments of project staff revealed that a characteristic of some young people which affected their ability to access education, employment and training was their desire to remain within their **familiar geographical area**. One project manager said that ‘in this day and age – the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – some of our young people have not left their geographical boundaries. They only know what outside [town] looks like by what they see on TV. So there is that fear factor’. This is further illustrated by the comment of a project manager that:

*The world seems to be the centre of this area for them...They no more dream of going to [nearby town] to work than they would of going to London to work or for education. It is very difficult to get them to think of going to the local colleges. If it is not on their doorstep then they don’t do it and that goes through the parents and grandparents.*

Moreover, some young people were suspicious or fearful of new people and those who were not from their area. *‘Unless you are born and bred here, you are never accepted’* was a typical comment. Consequently, some project staff stressed the importance of selecting the location and catchment area of a project by drawing on local knowledge. They explained that many young people were very **territorial** and would not go to a project if it was in a different area, or would not mix with young people from different areas.

Project managers and workers were conscious of the negative experiences which many young people had of **school**. Many of their young clients were excluded, either by the schools or by themselves, or were at risk of exclusion and perhaps *‘struggling’* with school. Interviewees suggested a variety of explanations for their clients’ experience of school, some of which reflected the young people’s perceptions outlined earlier in Section 5.2.1. A breakdown in relationships with school staff, parents and young people was mentioned by one project manager who said:

*For whatever reason, school hasn’t worked...there are lots and lots of reasons that we are becoming aware of. School hasn’t worked and my personal experience is that it has a lot to do with relationships. Relationships with parents, relationships with the schools, parents with the children and parents’ expectations of the children.*

The challenge of adopting teaching and learning methods that were appropriate to this client group of young people is illustrated by the following comments:

*They basically don’t learn in the same way as other people in mainstream education...if you have a classroom based on 30 young people, the majority of them learn in the same way. However, you get people in the fringe element who don’t and need additional support, who crave extra attention.*

*They do want to learn, they do want to interact but not in that big institutional setting and not under those restrictions.*

Perhaps as a consequence of these experiences, nearly half of the project staff characterised their young clients as underachievers with poor literacy or numeracy and low aspirations. Some young people were said to be easily bored or disruptive.

Although a characteristic of many young people was a negative experience of school, one interviewee commented that his clients were *‘by and large, intelligent kids who need a bit of help’*. Another project manager noted the regrets of some of her young clients, and the potential for re-engagement, when she observed:

*When you work with older ones, there is a sense of ‘Oops, I’ve messed up here’ and there’s either an anger against the system that they weren’t dragged back into it and ‘Why wasn’t I made to stay in school even*

*though I wasn't enjoying it and EWO [Education Welfare Officer] has let me down' or else there is a sense of self-responsibility there – 'I messed up there and do want to get back into it'.*

The complex inter-relationship between young people's lives and their schooling, whereby their background and characteristics inhibited them from accessing their education, and their inability to access education led to a range of challenging characteristics, emerged from the interviews. One interviewee explained that: *'The last thing that was a priority to this individual young person was going to school. There were a whole range of issues before that'.*

Project managers and workers identified a range of **personal characteristics** which were displayed by the young people who participated in the NSF projects. The main characteristics are examined below.

Nearly half of the project staff mentioned the **low self-esteem** of the young people, who were said to *'not have much faith in themselves'*. The comment of one project worker illustrates the effect of the young people's experiences on their self-perception:

*When we ask young people to write three or four good things about themselves, you can hear a pin drop in the room because almost every one of them hasn't been able to identify anything good about themselves. But we have found that they have never been brought up in a way where they have had any of their achievements recognised or where they have been given praise for anything that they have done.*

Some young people were said to have **behavioural or emotional difficulties**. For example, one project worker described her clients as *'children who just don't know when to stop...and then it's not their fault afterwards, it's the teacher or whoever'*. Some of the young people could be violent, angry and antagonistic. One project worker noted the violent environment in which some lived when she said that *'there's an awful lot happening in the community around guns, around drugs, violence and they [the young people] have to deal with that'*.

In some instances, young people were said to have **mental health** difficulties, for example engaging in *'self-harm'* and talking about suicide. Some young people were said to have poor **social skills** and some were *'shy'* or *'withdrawn'*. Furthermore, a number of project staff said that some of their clients had been the victims of bullying. Instances of **teenage pregnancy** and the fact that some young people were *'very promiscuous'* were also noted.

Further characteristics of young NSF clients which were mentioned by three-quarters of interviewees were the use of **drugs and alcohol** and involvement in **crime**. The relationship between their experiences and personal characteristics and their use of drugs was illustrated by the observation of one project manager who said that: *'A young person can't go a day without having*

*to have weed. The reasons they are telling us they are taking it is to calm them down. So there again it is all that anger and frustration'. Another project manager provided an example of the effect of this lifestyle on a young person's attitude:*

*Talking to him, it was like talking to someone of 40 – the things that he knew but things that he shouldn't know. Drugs and drink and nightclubs and women and things like that. Well there's no room for everything in anyone's life...he thinks he has done everything at 17 because he has.*

The **criminal behaviour** of some clients was also regarded as a consequence of the young people's backgrounds by some project staff. As one commented: '*Anger, resentment, bitterness that leads to an approach or attitude of "don't care – if I end up in prison, who cares? – so I don't care"*'. Another project worker suggested that peer pressure was an influential factor in causing his clients, whom he described as '*very, very nice people*', to '*get drawn into things that they wouldn't ordinarily do*'. He observed that:

*It's like when you read about your football hooligans in the daytime are a doctor or whatever and then they go out at the weekend and they're daft. These people are exactly the same, you can't help but like them, and then they go out and they are just stupid. If they were being stupid and you came along, they'd stop and show you around...there are one or two who, if they didn't do it, would lose face.*

Although project staff largely commented on the characteristics of the young people in terms of the challenges which their clients faced in accessing education, employment and training, they were positive about the individual young people who participated in their projects and perceived the potential in them. As one project manager said: '*99.5 per cent of these lads will turn out to be normal human beings like everybody else...It would be nice if everybody sees the light at the same time, so at 14 we all get our heads down, we all get educated and we all become bank managers, but we don't, do we?*'

It is clear that the challenge for the NSF project workers was to help to overcome these negative experiences and perceptions and demonstrate to young people that alternatives were available in order to re-engage them. The methods which they adopted in identifying and engaging the young people form the focus of the next chapter.

## **5.3 Experience and Training of Project Staff**

### **5.3.1 Experience of project staff**

The research found that the amount of experience that project staff had in working with young people and, in particular, disaffected young people, varied considerably.

Overall, project staff had considerable knowledge and understanding of the client group. More than two-thirds of project staff reported that they had several years experience of working with such young people, most commonly through **youth and community work** in various settings, including youth clubs, homeless shelters, support groups, or through **social work**. A small number of staff had worked in the **Probation Service** or **Youth Offending Teams**. A few of these people were working in the same community in which they had been a youth/social/probation worker and were aware of the specific problems facing the young people in that area. For example, one project worker revealed that he had worked with many of the young people attending his NSF project, through his previous role as a youth worker and, therefore, had the advantage of knowing the majority of them very well.

A few project workers had an **education background**, either as a teacher or a teaching assistant. This had given them experience of working with underachievers and those at risk of becoming disaffected. One project worker noted his previous experience of dealing with young people with behavioural problems, which many of the young people targeted by the NSF were said to display, as described in Section 5.2.2.

Six of the project workers who were interviewed had **no experience** of working with this age group of young people, whilst a few did have experience of working with younger children. Several project workers noted that, although they had no formal experience of working with this client group, their previous careers had given them experience of working with young people who were similar to those targeted by NSF projects.

Although some project workers did not have any formal experience of working with these young people, many of them **lived in the community** in which the NSF project was located. These individuals, therefore, benefited from having knowledge of the area and the community, and the needs of the young people. This was highlighted by one project worker, who emphasised that *‘because we live on the estate, we know what their family is going through and what the family is facing...we all know that so we can deal with it...I know how these young people feel’*. Several project managers stated that they purposefully employed people from the area, not only because they were more able to relate to the young people, and improve links between the young people and the local community, but also to give employment opportunities to people in the community. One project manager explained that she wanted *‘to employ local people to engage them too or educate them as well into wanting to work with the young people’*.

The research found that, in some cases, the experience of the project staff was **specific** to the particular needs of the young people. For example, projects working with young offenders had staff from Probation/Youth Offending backgrounds, and one project working with young mothers had workers from childcare backgrounds.



Often projects had staff who came from a range of different backgrounds and had a **range of experiences** of working with young people. This was illustrated by one project worker, who declared: *‘Some of our staff are more experienced than others. The majority of them have done youth work training...we have some staff who haven't done any youth work training, but they have experience of working with young people in other settings...I suppose as a team we have had a lot of experience’*.

Although the formal training and experience of staff were valued by the project managers, the research indicated that staff with little such experience can also make a valuable contribution, particularly when they are members of the community in which the NSF project is based. One CDF Regional Adviser identified the qualities required by project staff: *‘NSF projects need a good quality of staff – not necessarily trained staff, but people with commitment and perseverance, who can relate to young people.’*

### **5.3.2 Training of project staff**

The research found that, in most cases, those project workers who had prior experience of working with young people had undergone some type of training for their previous role. This was generally in youth or community work, social work or education.

Where project workers had received training as a result of the NSF, through their particular Managing Agent, this included training in:

- ◆ child protection
- ◆ health and safety
- ◆ project management
- ◆ legislation (including legislation relating to education, health, youth justice and housing)
- ◆ mental health issues
- ◆ first aid.

Six project workers indicated that they had not received any formal training through the NSF and commented that their training *‘was literally as we went along’* or that they had learnt from other, more experienced members of staff. One project worker emphasised that through this ‘on-the-job’ training, *‘we have learnt a lot – it has been a big learning curve’*.

### Key Findings

- ◆ NSF projects served communities in areas of multiple disadvantage, characterised by generational unemployment, low aspirations and high levels of crime and substance misuse. The areas lacked appropriate and accessible resources and amenities for young people, who often encountered negative attitudes from adults in their communities.
- ◆ Project staff identified a gap in the provision of services for young people in their locality. In addition, they reported that their clients had often rejected other types of provision, including mainstream education. Other agencies were sometimes reluctant to share information with NSF projects, which was partly explained by fear of competition and perceived duplication of provision.
- ◆ Negative experiences of school, which stemmed from the attitude and approach of teachers, the teaching and learning methods adopted and conflict with other students, characterised the lives of many of the young people interviewed. Consequently, they were angry, aggressive or withdrawn, were persistent truants or excluded from school and lacked basic skills.
- ◆ Project staff highlighted the difficult family backgrounds of many of their clients and the neglect and lack of care that were a feature of some of their lives. The young people were described as marginalised in society and suspicious of new people and experiences.
- ◆ NSF clients often had low self-esteem and sometimes poor social skills, and some displayed emotional and behavioural difficulties. Abuse of drugs and alcohol and involvement in criminal activity were other common characteristics of the client group.
- ◆ Project staff had experience of working with young people through youth and community work, and the education and probation services. Additional training had been provided to some staff through the NSF.



## 6. ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE – INITIAL CONTACT

### 6.1 Promotion of NSF Projects

The research found that, in order to engage young people, NSF staff promoted their projects to two main groups – young people themselves and agencies and organisations which might be in a position to refer young people on to the projects.

Many interviewees had ensured that key **referral agencies** were aware of their project and what it could provide for young people. These agencies included:

- ◆ schools, including Learning Support Units and Learning Mentors;
- ◆ LEAs;
- ◆ Education Welfare Officers (EWOs);
- ◆ Connexions Services and Careers Services;
- ◆ Youth Offending Teams;
- ◆ Job Centres;
- ◆ Health Service;
- ◆ colleges of further education;
- ◆ other NSF projects.

In order to promote the NSF project to these organisations, project staff often undertook personal visits or more formal presentations. Indeed, one project worker considered this to be more effective than simply sending information when she recommended that NSF project staff should *‘speak to them face-to-face rather than just sending out information. We’ve found that they get the information [but] six months down the line they may not have heard of us and we know we’ve sent them information. So seeing them face-to-face helps’*. Another project manager concurred, commenting that *‘we found out that the best way was to actually go to the agencies themselves – to their team meetings – and explain what we are doing’*. The young people interviewed, many of whom had been referred to the NSF project by an agency such as their school, EWO, social worker or careers adviser, considered that most young people would become aware of the project through their contact with an agency. In one case, the young interviewee reflected that one would hear about the NSF project *‘if you are bad at school’*.

Some organisations had proved less responsive than others to the promotion of NSF projects, perhaps in part because they were unaware of the needs of the

young people with whom they worked. For example, one project manager commented that a school in the area had indicated that it did not have any young people who met the criteria for NSF. However, through their outreach work, project staff met with a group of young people who were truanting from the school. The project manager approached the school and explained that *'you said to us that you don't have a problem – what we're saying to you is that we are working with eight of your girls now'*. Project staff across the projects often emphasised the need to develop a productive and supportive relationship with schools and other referring agencies in order to access this client group.

In addition to face-to-face meetings and presentations, a number of projects had developed leaflets which provided details of their project. In some instances, the young participants had been instrumental in developing these leaflets. In addition to providing information for the referring agencies, these leaflets could be used for more direct promotion of the NSF project to young people. Project leaflets were often, therefore, distributed in *'prominent places in town'*, shopping centres, supermarkets, doctors' surgeries and youth and community centres. One project sent them directly to members of the local community. One constraint on using leaflets to promote to young people, which was encountered by a project worker, was that young people said *'well, it's no use because I can't read'*. Nevertheless, many of the young people who were interviewed cited leaflets as an effective means of promoting the NSF project. Some suggested that leaving leaflets in appropriate locations alone would be insufficient and, as one observed, *'you could do it better if you went about the street and give leaflets to parents or other students you see walking around'*. Posters about the project were also identified by a number of young people as a means of promoting, but one cautioned that *'if young people see it on a flyer, they'll just walk past. I've probably seen a poster and walked straight past it'*.

An alternative approach to promoting the project to young people was through having groups of NSF clients making a presentation to their peers. As a project manager commented:

*We have taken young people with us and asked them to be involved in talking to other young people and that approach works really well. They are their own best ambassadors.*

Young people identified the value of promoting the project through **word of mouth**. Indeed, some had heard about the NSF project because *'people talk about it'*. They explained that this approach would be effective *'because all the young people will listen to younger people rather than adults'* and that *'you can explain what it's like. You can tell them all you like but if one of the mates says "well we did this and we did that" then it is better'*.

Being an organisation which was **well known** in the community was identified as a positive factor in promotion, as was the central location of the centre.

Indeed, some of the young people anticipated that peers would become aware of the project when *‘walking past’*.

Gaining credibility with the target group was highlighted as an important element of promotion by one project worker who said that project staff *‘try to have a lot of contact with that group [of young people who hang out in the city centre] so they all know about [the project] anyway, so it has a bit of kudos, which is good’*. Promotion through **outreach** work with groups of young people on the streets was frequently used, as will be discussed in Section 6.2. Some of the young people who were interviewed highlighted the benefits of this approach, for example one observed that *‘[project workers] go on this little tour and they ride around in the car and give leaflets out and when they see young people on the streets like during the week so they know they are not in school and tell them to come down to [project]’*.

A few project staff drew attention to the **financial barriers** to conducting marketing or promotion activity. A further constraint was the limit of the project’s **capacity**, as a project worker observed: *‘We can only take a small amount, so if we advertise too much we get too many young people that get turned away’*; while a manager stated that *‘we have maximum numbers at the moment...there’s a waiting list’*. Another project worker commented that *‘we’ve been quite a closely guarded secret’*. A few young people also reflected that the project should not be too widely promoted *‘because a lot of people would come, and bad people would come’*.

## 6.2 Referral and Recruitment to NSF Projects

The research found that the projects had adopted a range of approaches to identifying and engaging potential NSF clients which either involved direct contact with the young people or other agencies with whom they might have contact. The agencies included one or more of the following:

- ◆ schools, including specialist pupil referral units (PRUs), teenage pregnancy units and Learning Mentors in Excellence in Cities areas;
- ◆ Youth Offending Teams;
- ◆ Youth Service;
- ◆ Social Services and social inclusion units;
- ◆ Careers Service or Connexions;
- ◆ other local community and youth projects, including other NSF projects;
- ◆ Job Centres and the employment service;
- ◆ Health Service.

The more direct methods of engaging young people on to the NSF projects included **outreach work and visits** to young people’s homes, self-referral and word of mouth. Staff in more than half of the projects mentioned that they

undertook some outreach, including on the streets and in local housing estates, on the basis that *'these young people didn't go to school and weren't going to come to the centre – we needed to go out there and engage with them'*, as a project manager expressed it. However, around a fifth of projects had as many young people attending as they had places for and so did not use outreach. Many projects had experienced self-referral and word-of-mouth referrals, including referrals from parents. Indeed some had established themselves as a 'drop-in' centre to facilitate these informal referrals. For example, one project manager observed that young people were:

*recognising that there is a base within their community that they feel safe to go into: an organisation where the people are warm, an organisation where they can get results, where they are going to be listened to.*

A second project manager highlighted the benefits of the 'drop-in' approach to engaging young people:

*They are not constrained to times. They can come in and access a warm drink and lunch and during that time you can find out more about the young person than when you put them in a structured environment and try to make them tell you things.*

### 6.3 Barriers and Strategies in Engaging Young People

The characteristics of potential NSF clients, outlined in Chapter 5, illustrate some of the challenges which might be encountered in engaging them in an NSF project. The experiences of project staff revealed a variety of barriers which they had encountered, and sought to overcome, in engaging this group of young people.

Some of the barriers which were encountered related to the referring **agencies** with whom the projects had links. One project manager had developed a formal referral system in order to avoid young people being '*dumped*' on the project. Another explained that *'schools will often pass on the ones that they just don't know what to do with...we have been working with schools...so that they are actually selecting young people before they get to the point of not going to school at all'*. One project manager had found that schools did not refer young people to NSF, despite her visits to the schools to explain the project. Another had encountered barriers in receiving lists of school leavers who could benefit from the project's support. However, this had been overcome through '*persistence*'. Some projects had experienced a lack of support from the Youth Service or Social Services, and one project worker emphasised the importance of earning '*the credibility and trust*' of the '*gatekeepers*'.

Most of the barriers to engaging young people, which were identified by the project staff, related to the **young people** themselves. The issues included finding the young people, gaining their trust and getting them to participate.

In order to **find the young people** who were not referred through agencies, and were sometimes ‘*young people who do not want to be found*’, project staff engaged in outreach work. This was time and resource intensive, but often regarded as an important alternative to referral through agencies. As one project worker explained:

*The easiest way is to use the school group. It is a static group of young people and if you go up to the school and arrange a meeting with them they will all be there at a certain time. It is easy and it is effective in that there is enough commitment from these students to go to school an hour a day...whether it is the most positive way of working with them long-term is a different kettle of fish.*

Once project staff had made contact with the young people, through whatever means, the next challenge was to **gain their trust**. As a project manager stated: ‘*you have to build up their trust as another adult coming into their lives*’. Young people were described as ‘*really wary*’ and ‘*suspicious*’ sometimes because of ‘*the experience they have had at school or they’ve had with adults in their lives*’ or because ‘*they’ve been let down so many times in the past*’. Time and care were also necessary to ‘*convince them that “we are going to give you something for nothing”*’. Becoming familiar to them so that they could see ‘*she’s not some weirdo, she’s obviously OK*’ was the initial requirement. Project staff who were members of the same community perceived an advantage in their background in understanding the young people when they observed ‘*we know the reason why...just community knowledge because we live here*’. In establishing this contact, and building the relationship, one project worker outlined the value of ‘*putting yourself on the line sometimes. You are out there, you are accessible...you are prepared to be back there the same time next week. You are prepared to sit and listen*’. In gaining the trust of young people, the importance of listening confidentially and in a non-judgemental way was emphasised by a number of project staff, as the following comment illustrates:

*I am always conscious of the fact of when I am talking to a young person not to appear shocked by anything that they tell me...It is just a case of trying to build up a relationship where there is some trust. Making the young person aware of that and [that] what they tell us is confidentially [sic]. We will talk to them in confidence and it is just building that initial link of trust...making the young person feel that somebody is actually concerned about what they are doing.*

The next phase of engaging the young people was to **interest them in, and encourage them to participate** in, the NSF project. A key factor in achieving this, which was identified by interviewees, was to ensure that they knew that they could choose whether or not to participate. A project manager commented that this element of choice was novel for young people who ‘*up to that point...have to go to school...have to do this...have to do that*’. Interviews with young people revealed that they had a choice in whether to participate or not. Gaining their involvement in the context of peer pressure not to attend, and role models whose income was through ‘*alternative*



*economies*', presented project staff with a challenge. Furthermore, one project manager had noted some '*stigma*' associated with the NSF project, and another believed that, '*it is not an official training course and I feel that among the older members of the Asian community there is a big thing of whether something is respectable and how they're perceived*'.

While the approach of the project worker and the establishment of a relationship were said to be influential on engaging young people, offering **appropriate provision** which would interest and engage them was essential. One project manager described the activity offered as the '*carrot*', and another explained that they identified an interest of the young person '*because that's the engagement bit*' and then gradually added other elements to the package. Another manager cautioned against '*anything that smacks of discipline or too much structure or a feeling that they are being told what to do*' or the young people would be '*off like a shot*'. Project workers took account of negative previous school experiences and were aware that some young people were '*scared of having another negative experience of learning*' and sought to present the NSF location as an alternative. Consequently, as one project worker stated, '*as soon as they set foot across the door and see it is not a classroom they seem more interested*'. However, one project worker noted that the '*flexibility and informality of it can be quite daunting*' to some young people. Nevertheless, the general success of these approaches was reflected in the interviews with young people who often indicated that they had chosen to attend an NSF project because of the people, the individual activities or the fact that it was different to school, despite their expectations.

Other barriers to engaging young people which had been experienced by project staff included:

- ◆ accessing the '*invisible ones*' who were not out on the street, but nevertheless could benefit from support, including young Asian women;
- ◆ making contact with young people who spoke little English, for example refugees;
- ◆ meeting the needs of young people who did not live near the project.

Strategies which project staff identified as contributing to the successful initial engagement of young people in the NSF projects included:

- ◆ not '*mixing*' young people from different areas without preparing them;
- ◆ reassuring young people who may be less '*streetwise*' or '*hard or tough*' than other young participants;
- ◆ clarifying with young people that involvement would not adversely affect any government benefits they might be receiving;
- ◆ ensuring that new participants were accompanied on their initial visit to the project by the referral agency worker.

## 6.4 Induction and Assessment of Needs

The initial experience which young people have of an NSF project is likely to be critical to their decision to continue to attend and engage with the project. Although the projects each adopted approaches to **induction** which met their project aims and the needs of their clients, some common approaches emerged. It is worth noting that in some projects the young people joined as a group, while in others individual clients joined on an ongoing basis.

Where projects had new clients starting at any time, the induction was usually on a one-to-one basis where they would come to the project location and would be introduced to staff and the other clients, for example to see if they would *‘gel with the other young people’*. One project worker mentioned that she would ask one of the existing clients to explain the project to the new recruit. In most cases, project staff said that they would explain the rules and what the project could provide for them to the new recruit and would seek their agreement to participate. The young people’s accounts reveal that, although they were sometimes apprehensive about the possibility of not knowing people on the project, they generally found the staff and other clients to be friendly and welcoming and that this was often one of the reasons why they returned the next time.

Projects where the young people started as a group adopted a similar approach to induction although they sometimes undertook ice-breaking or team-building exercises, such as cooking breakfast together, to help the young people to become familiar with each other and the staff. Young recruits would either be informed of the rules of the project or, in some instances, would be involved in formulating and agreeing the rules for their group of clients. In a similar way, the members of the new group were sometimes instrumental in identifying the activities for the group as the project workers had *‘no set agenda’*.

In most cases, the induction would last for a day. However, one project had developed a three-week structured induction programme during which staff aimed to *‘gently get them into the flow of things. During that time we do a bit of cart racing and lots of team building and give them activities’*. The induction culminated in an emergency first aid course, for which the young people gained a certificate, and each young person identifying a member of staff as their key worker. This approach had been adopted following experiences whereby *‘kids didn’t know enough about the project to commit themselves to it and would drop out’*.

Most projects provided basic information regarding health and safety, first aid and details of the building during the induction. Some of the projects provided a *‘welcome pack’* or booklet anticipating that the young people might not take in all the information. Two of the projects said that they told the young people that the aim of their time on the NSF project was *‘to re-engage them and reintegrate them back into the mainstream’*.

In order to respond to the individual needs of the young people, the projects undertook either formal or informal **assessments** of these needs. Projects which received referrals from other agencies which were working with young people often obtained relevant background information through the referral process. However, some preferred the young people to ‘*come with a clean sheet*’.

Formal approaches which were adopted included the use of tests, computer assessment or ‘*tick sheets*’. Project workers held differing views over the use of tests with this client group. One project manager remarked that ‘*we have written tests which we don’t make the young people do. If they absolutely refuse then it tells us something*’, whereas another said that ‘*we don’t believe in written tests or that sort of assessment*’, and another stated that tests were not used because ‘*we don’t want to focus on inadequacies*’.

Project workers were conscious of some of their clients’ previous negative experiences and assessed their clients’ needs with varying degrees of informality. One manager observed that ‘*we have to be careful we don’t make it too academic and school-like. We don’t want to create that environment so it may be an informal chat*’, while another reflected that ‘*we used to do an interview but it just didn’t work, you get all the information from people just by being with them and the little comments that they make*’. The benefits of working with small numbers of young people and knowing them well were mentioned by some project workers:

*...because it is a small group, you are able to give them one-to-one.*

*...we don’t scale them or have a chat and give them two for this and two for that. It’s just what we instinctively pick up on.*

The assessment of needs was not always regarded as a process of identifying areas for development. One project worker outlined how the process helped to identify existing qualities and skills ‘*something they excel in...others in the group may look up to that person and feel that they can get support from that person*’. Moreover, some project workers mentioned the supportive nature of any assessment, as illustrated in the comment of one project worker who said that they aimed to make ‘*the young people realise that we are not going to tell them what to do but when they have made their mind up about what they want to do then we can help them to actually achieve what they want*’.

Some project staff observed that the assessment of the needs of the young people was not an event but a process because ‘*an individual’s needs change – you address one and another becomes apparent. It’s an ongoing process*’. Half of the projects cited the use of action plans in supporting this process. In some instances, action plans were formal documents containing goals which sometimes formed part of the process of review. Such plans also contributed to the ability to tailor programmes to meet individual needs. Project workers noted the importance of completing action plans ‘*alongside the young person*’ as opposed to completing them ‘*on their behalf*’. Some of the young people

who were interviewed found these to be helpful. For example, one interviewee commented that his action plan set out ‘*what I have done and what I might be doing the next day and what I would be doing in the future...I found it useful...because it reflected what I was doing*’. In contrast, one project had ceased using formal action plans because their young clients had disliked them.

## 6.5 Lessons Learned in Engaging Young People

Drawing on their experience of running an NSF project, staff identified some lessons which they had learned in engaging young people.

- ♦ In promoting the work of the NSF project to referral agencies, staff had found that a personal, mediated approach was more effective than ‘*deluging*’ referral agencies with letters, leaflets and documentation.
- ♦ There was value in having a formal referral mechanism, which involved key agencies with responsibility for the young people. This ensured that all partner agencies could track the young people and maintain contact with them as necessary and avoided young people being ‘*dumped*’ on the project.
- ♦ One project requested that the contact person from the referral agency accompanied the young person on their first visit or first day at the NSF project. This aimed to overcome the problem of non-attendance by reducing the young person’s apprehension at going somewhere they did not know and meeting new people.
- ♦ Allowing for a ‘*taster*’ period before the start of the project enabled young people to sample the project and decide if they wished to participate. Consequently, those who might have dropped-out during the project left before it started, and other young people could take their place.
- ♦ To promote the project to young people, using existing or previous clients to present, discuss and explain the project had been found to be an effective approach.
- ♦ Although projects differed, some had found that a formal approach to assessing needs or action planning was off-putting to their young clients. A more informal, ongoing, discursive approach was considered to be more effective.

### Key Findings

- ◆ To promote their NSF projects, staff targeted both the young people themselves and the local agencies involved with young people. A mediated approach, whereby project staff visited referral agencies, was also found to be effective, and some projects involved the young people as 'ambassadors' in this process.
- ◆ Young people were recruited on to the projects through referral by agencies such as schools, Youth Offending Teams, Youth Services, Social Services and Careers Services or Connexions Services and through direct contact with the young people via outreach or drop-in centres.
- ◆ In engaging young people in the NSF projects, staff identified the need to take time to gain the trust of the potential clients and to design projects that offered appropriate provision which would interest and encourage the young people to participate. Staff explained that activities should be interesting and relevant to this client group, as unlike school as possible, and flexible and responsive to young people's needs.
- ◆ When inducting young people, staff introduced the new clients to other participants either through an ice-breaking session or in more informal ways. Young people, who were often apprehensive about going to a new place and meeting new people, appreciated the friendly and welcoming atmosphere.
- ◆ While some projects received information on the young person's needs through the referral agency, others preferred not to have such information and to make their own assessment of the young person. Where projects assessed their clients' needs, this was often undertaken informally through discussions and observation and aimed to be positive and supportive. Assessment was not a one-off experience but ongoing and could contribute to the development of individual action plans.

## 7. RE-ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE – SUSTAINING INVOLVEMENT

### 7.1 Types of Project Activities

Some of the projects were flexible in the range of activities which they provided and sought to be responsive to the young people's needs and requests. Others offered a more structured menu of activities but generally allowed for some flexibility within this. For example, one project manager commented: '*We've got this structured timetable but its got to change if need be*', and another said that, '*there is a structure to it, but they get choices within that*', and her manager described it as, '*flexible to the girls' needs on that particular day*'. In addition to the activities, it is worth noting that much of the work of the projects occurred throughout the time the young people were attending through informal discussions and support.

The main areas of the activities offered by the projects visited included:

- ♦ basic skills;
- ♦ life skills;
- ♦ personal development;
- ♦ work-related skills;
- ♦ practical activities;
- ♦ trips and residential;
- ♦ arts, music and sport activities;
- ♦ placements.

Projects indicated that they provided activities which supported the young people in gaining **basic and key skills**, particularly in literacy, numeracy, communication and information and communications technology (ICT). As mentioned earlier, in Section 6.4, in assessing the needs of their clients, project staff had noted that some young people lacked basic skills of reading and using numbers and targeted their activities to address this concern. In addition, some provided activities to develop young people's communication skills, which, in some instances, had been identified as having led '*to conflict at school*'. One project worker explained that she aimed to develop the young people's skills of '*listening and responding appropriately, and teaching them arguing skills if they don't agree*'. A critical area for clients in some projects was the development of ICT skills. This was regarded as a priority by one project manager who explained that they provided '*access to computers. Everyone thinks kids are great with computers but a lot of them haven't had*

*the opportunity because they haven't been to school or they did not get what they needed to help them with computers'. A second project worker mentioned the importance of developing ICT skills 'because ICT is a way forward for the future' in employment.*

The need to provide young NSF clients with the opportunity to develop broader personal skills and attributes was summarised by one project manager who said:

*When young people are out of school...we tend to focus on the fact that they are not doing English and maths and geography and history. We forget that there is also health education that goes on in school, there's leisure, sports and fitness, etc., there's the social interaction that goes on that young people totally miss out on, so some of our activities are aimed at addressing some of those needs.*

In response to this, a second area of activity among the NSF projects visited was the development of **life skills**. Examples of these included independent living skills, basic hygiene, first aid, budgeting and healthy eating and cooking. Of the latter, a project worker observed that *'a lot of them don't do it in school, or they just write about it – nutrition – but they never have the chance to actually cook'*. Sometimes, young people needed to develop these skills to enable them to cope with living on their own. However, occasionally working towards, and achieving, such skills was a means to encouraging and motivating the young people. For example, one manager used an emergency first aid course to enable his clients *'to get the qualification to raise their self-esteem'*.

Projects provided activities which aimed to influence the **personal development** of the young people. Elements of this included raising their self-esteem and addressing attitudes and behaviour. A project worker said she aimed to help the young people to be *'able to cope with things better and cope with their own behavioural responses better'*. Another project worker outlined the focus as a *'values clarification type of thing... "if you have this situation, what would you do or what would happen if you did this?" and that starts them thinking, perhaps bringing their reason up a little bit'*. A third project worker explained that this role was *'about confronting issues. Issues like racism, sexism, bullying you deal with. You don't walk away, you don't let them stew, but you deal with them. You challenge and you put forward points of view'*.

Some projects had also identified a need to provide information and education relating to drugs and sexual relations. The value of providing an opportunity to discuss these issues in small groups was highlighted by one project manager who observed that at school, the young people learn about sex *'in a big group and they are too embarrassed to ask questions'*. In fulfilling this identified need, a number of projects made use of specialist agencies through having guest speakers or making use of their documentation.

In some instances, project staff identified the development of **work-related skills** as a focus of their activities. For example, one project aimed to enhance the customer service skills of the young people, and a few projects identified the effective use of the telephone as a target area. Activities which sought to develop clients' skills at working in a team, which would be beneficial to them in the world of work, had a more immediate relevance in ice breaking and promoting group cohesion. Furthermore, one project worker identified the value of team-building activities in helping young people with their relationships personally and in school when she observed that *'if they don't like certain members of the team...[they] learn how to deal with it'*. In addition, some projects made explicit links with the Careers Service or Connexions Service locally in order to facilitate access to expert advice and guidance on jobs and careers.

**Practical activities** were widely used among the projects visited. Examples included motorbike maintenance, riding and maintaining go-karts, working on an allotment and painting, decorating and maintaining homes. In some cases, the activities contributed to the local community. As one project manager explained, this type of activity:

*builds their confidence and they get respect from the community and it builds respect for the people's property. And it is bridging the link [sic] between the old and the young and the misconceptions that all young people don't want to do anything and that they are lazy etc.*

Young people also undertook **trips and residential**s. In many cases, the aim of these activities was not so much the activity itself but the associated processes and opportunities it presented. For example, one project manager recalled that the residential allowed her and her colleagues to *'see the needs of these young people when they are away from this environment...It's like a weekend of observing the young people but they don't know we are observing them'*. A second project worker observed that trips out enabled him *'just to try to get to know them, to know who we are and then, once you've got a captive audience, it's quite easy to say "we can offer this, we can offer that"'*. Involving the young people in organising the trips was a key tool in developing them, in some cases, as described by one project worker who said *'one of the young people has a real temper, so we've given him ownership for that [trip] and he's kind of mellowed a little bit with the responsibility'*.

Other activities included those which focused on **art, music or sport**. Examples included the use of videos, mixing and DJ-ing, and completing a mural in the local community. Sport was used by one project in particular to *'give them something to get that aggression out and testing their fitness and their sticking with things'*. The final activity cited was **placements** in college, with private training providers or in employment. One project manager highlighted the importance of such provision in preparing NSF clients for their later transition *'rather than just starting them at college when they finish, and they panic'*.



Some of the activities which were offered by projects led to, or contributed towards, the **achievement of a qualification**. These included an NVQ in, for example, childcare, Key Skills units, ICT qualifications such as CLAIT and the European Community Driving Licence. Some projects offered the ASDAN Youth Award, which one project worker remarked has ‘*credibility*’ with both young people and employers, while others were structured around the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

In providing these activities for the young people, project staff were conscious of the need to adopt appropriate delivery methods for young people who presented particular challenges, as outlined in Chapter 5. The approaches to achieving this which were adopted by the projects visited are outlined below.

Some projects had developed alternative **approaches to learning** in recognition of the negative experiences which some young people had of schools, or their lack of exposure to schooling and development of basic skills. One project worker explained that:

*we did want it to be more kind of formal training but it doesn't work because a lot of young people have been out of school for two years so their reading and writing isn't that good. So we find it quite difficult to do even the ICT sessions. What we have to do is get strategy games and teach them that way about ICT.*

A second project organised an activity where the young people presented a profile of themselves where ‘*it is all done in doodles, you know, stick men, so they don't have to do writing because that is possibly one of the problems that they feel*’. A third project worker noted the project's role in providing a different approach for this client group when she observed that:

*we are not doing mainstream education. It is an alternative provision where they can achieve. We give them accreditation in a way that they can enjoy and that is not entirely classroom based and that they are progressing [in] without them realising it.*

Another challenge of working with this client group, according to some project staff was that ‘*they get bored and distracted easily*’ and ‘*it is when they become bored it was a problem*’. In response, a project worker commented that ‘*their attention span is very, very short...let them have a break [to] do what they want and then fetch them back*’. Some young people had not only rejected school, but alternative provision too; as the comment of a project worker illustrates, this presented NSF project staff with a further challenge:

*the young people had been on a number of projects and a number of courses and all failed. So we had to do something a little bit different to try and engage them and keep them turning up.*

In response to these challenges, NSF project staff were ‘*trying to be as creative, eclectic, trying to look at as many possible ways of supporting these children as we can*’. The NSF's role in facilitating a creative response to the

needs of these young people was emphasised by one project manager who said that *‘the beauty of NSF is...we have got a lot of flexibility...we can develop our own models and our own strategies for working with these kids and we try to reconnect them’*. Project staff aimed to be responsive and flexible and to *‘try and tailor the teaching and the lessons towards their needs within their abilities’*. They looked for activities and approaches so that the young people were *‘so busy enjoying what they are doing, they don’t realise they are learning’* or *‘anything that could get them to learn, but in a fun way’*. A key factor in providing engaging activities for this group of young people was to *‘try and respect them. We do try and endeavour to help the kids develop their own ideas as well’*. In respecting the young people, a project worker stated that *‘it’s about being clear. It’s about being consistent. It’s about being honest. It’s about not promising things you can’t deliver’*.

A further aspect of the provision of NSF projects in that it differed from school was the use of small groups or one-to-one work. As noted in Chapter 5, a number of young people were apprehensive about being within a large group of people and sometimes felt that they were given insufficient attention and support when at school. In contrast, as a project worker observed:

*one thing is the classroom size is a lot smaller, as opposed to mainstream education where there is perhaps 25 to 26 other students, so we are able to offer them that sort of one-to-one tutoring which they wouldn’t get, I think, if they were in an ordinary school.*

In order to support this type of activity, some projects made use of volunteer mentors who could work on a one-to-one basis in a sustained way with a young person.

This section has outlined the main areas of activity and the approaches adopted in the NSF projects which were visited. It has revealed that a flexible and responsive approach was common in which respect for young people, and their choices, was considered to be critical. Furthermore, in delivering the activities, project staff used approaches that were different from school, such as small groups and practical activities, and often hid the learning elements within the activities. The extent to which the young people responded positively to these activities forms the focus of the next section.

## **7.2 Project Activities: Experiences and Views**

This section discusses young people’s and project workers’ views and experiences of project activities. In particular, it focuses on what activities were most popular with young people, and explores the key factors in the design of project activities that were seen to enable the sustained engagement of young people.

### 7.2.1 Popular activities

The following types of activities were found to be popular with the majority of young people involved in projects where these activities were made available to them:

- ◆ leisure activities;
- ◆ day trips;
- ◆ residential;
- ◆ preparing and eating food together;
- ◆ creative activities.

These are explored in further detail below.

**Leisure activities**, including bowling, riding bikes, go-karting, playing football and hiking, were particularly popular with young people. In fact, many said they were attracted to projects which offered such activities. One young man, for example, explained how he got involved in a project: *‘She was just talking to me and she said: “Do you like motorbikes?” and I said “Yes”, and she said “There’s this thing that’s going on, it’s a new project”. So I came here and started going.’*

Equally popular with most young people were **day trips** and **residential**, which provided the opportunity to travel outside their towns, or even parts of town, for the first time. Day trips were used to allow them to access leisure services not normally available to them. As one young man commented: *‘When we went to Birmingham, as soon as we got there we went straight to Pizza Hut and then to two art galleries. They had really good pictures, like pieces of fruit and portraits and loads of stuff’. Residential*, which usually involved outdoor activities such as abseiling, canoeing or rock climbing, were seen by young people as a good way of *‘just getting away’* from their normal environments, accessing the activities on offer and having the chance to *‘gel as a group’*. One young participant, for example, commented: *‘All the activities are good, but the residential was best when we went away. It was good there. We did sailing, canoeing, climbing – loads of activities’*.

Activities centred on **preparing and eating food together** were also enjoyed by most participants. One project, for example, started each day with tea and toast, and had special days where they prepared lunch together. It was found that not only did this activity improve young people’s ability to work and feel as part of team, but it also offered project workers an opportunity to talk to the whole group in a relaxed atmosphere: *‘We sit them round and we have tea and toast, and that’s when you get a lot of information: “I’d like to do so-and-so”. I think listening to them is the biggest part.’*

Finally, many young people commented favourably on any **creative activities** that they were involved in, including art, dance, music and video production. One girl explained how she had enjoyed making a video on bullying:

*We did a video about bullying because most of the people that came got bullied at school. And we made a video and we were walking up to people in the streets with a video camera and a microphone and we asked them “What do you think about bullying?”. Some people just walked away but some people stood there and told us what they thought about it. And then we went on the Internet and found out loads of things about it. I loved doing that because we went to interview policemen about it as well and we all had a go at everything!*

Another young man had found a DJ-ing course very inspiring: ‘*The DJ-ing course was good. When they were on about mixing all types of music, it was like mixing all types of different ways of life and all.*’

In contrast, young people’s interest in, and enjoyment of, more formal learning activities appeared, to a large extent, to be dependent on their level of disengagement from and motivation for learning before joining projects. A broad distinction can be made between:

- ♦ those young people who were **disengaged from formal education**, but still saw a purpose for learning and achievement; and
- ♦ those young people who were **disengaged from any kind of learning** and saw very little value, if any, in pursuing any form of education or training.

It should be noted, though, that not all young people should be regarded as easily identified as belonging to either of these two categories, and that some participants may have moved between these categories as a result of early positive experiences on projects.

Many of the young people who could be regarded as belonging to the first category were interested in activities which provided them with an opportunity to develop skills and/or acquire qualifications in a less formal setting than school. Indeed, as one project manager explained, some young people only wanted ‘*to be involved in something that is still mainstream*’ and was seen as leading to learning outcomes, such as qualifications or certificates. Such participants were sometimes resistant to joining less mainstream activities, which have ‘*the stigma of being targeted at the disaffected kids*’. In one project, staff explained that they had struggled to get Asian young people involved in project activities that were not seen as ‘training’ due to parental resistance:

*There seems to be this thing where parents don’t want their sons and daughters to be seen to be going to a project that is helping disaffected young people because they don’t want anyone to know that their son or daughter is disaffected and disengaged.*

Project activities which helped young people to gain access to alternative forms of learning environments such as colleges, training providers, or small group work within projects, which were better suited to their needs, appeared to be most popular. One girl, for example, who had felt disengaged and had

hardly attended school before joining the NSF project had benefited from the close attention and support she received from project workers in helping her to achieve several certificates:

*When I was in school I wouldn't do nothing – no work or anything. I would just go behind the block and smoke. And here I have just done loads of stuff and I feel really good about it. Probably because I am getting more support than I do at school, because it is like [two project workers] and there is only a few of us.*

Similarly, one young man who had not attended school for the last two years appreciated the possibility that the project gave him to improve his literacy: 'reading and writing because it might help me when I grow up – when I am older'.

Young people who appeared to be disengaged from any kind of learning were said to be mainly attracted to projects which offered them different types of leisure activities. These were often not presented to the young people as attempts at re-engaging them into learning or helping them to move on. This was in many cases intentional; as one project worker explained, 'they'd run a mile, if they knew what we're trying to do'. Indeed, many of the young people appeared not to be aware of the aims of the project activities they were involved in, simply regarding them as 'fun activities'. Another project worker commented:

*I think they just think we are giving them somewhere to go and we give them dinner money and occasionally we go on trips. If you asked them, I think that is what they would say and as far as I am concerned that is fine. They don't see the way they are engaged is about learning or moving on. Some of them do, but it takes some time.*

In addition to the activities provided, supporting young people to move on and re-engage required a sustained and consistent attitude and approach from project staff, as illustrated by the following comment from a project manager:

*It doesn't mean 'Look I am hungry. Can you give me 50 pence to buy a portion of chips?'. No it means being real. It means being honest and it means being able to say to young people 'That was wrong and I will explain to you why that was wrong'. So being affirmative, being able to chastise but also being able to demonstrate that what I am doing and what I am saying is for your betterment. I think also within that is the ability to provide the services that young people do need to enable them to become successful citizens. And that means for young people to be able to say after two or three years that organisation helped me.*

Another project used what they called a more explicit 'carrot and stick' approach of attracting severely disengaged young people on to projects with fun activities but requiring them to engage in particular learning activities in return. As the project coordinator explained:

*The carrot is go-karting, which the young kids find addictive...We offer them go-karting and in return for that they have to do certain things which we think will help them reconnect, like life skills and a whole range of skills and qualifications.*

### **7.2.2 Key characteristics of successful project activities**

Young people's and project workers' comments suggested that the following key factors were most important to ensure the sustained engagement of young people:

- ♦ giving young people the feeling of ownership of the projects and activities;
- ♦ providing participants with targets to aim for;
- ♦ offering activities that were relevant to young people's interests and concerns;
- ♦ activities that were not based on too much written work;
- ♦ providing practical, hands-on activities;
- ♦ combining clear structures with the flexibility to respond to individuals' needs;
- ♦ activities run by good project staff.

These are explored in further detail below.

Project workers and young people alike emphasised the value of giving participants a feeling of **ownership** by allowing them a choice in what activities they wanted to do as well as a responsibility for planning, running and improving project activities. As one member of staff pointed out:

*I think they feel ownership because we don't impose things on them. We always come to an agreement with them even if it is going on a residential. ...Whereas if we said 'This is what you have and this is what you are doing', the young people will actually tell you, 'You are just like everything else I've been on' and 'You're not treating us as adults'. And it is just that step from treating them as children to treating them like young adults and involve them in what is going on.*

Similarly, many participants emphasised the importance of being given a choice to give them a feeling of ownership, as one young man explained: 'You're not pushed into doing anything. You get a choice, you're made to feel welcome here – you get a choice in what you want to do. People are asking you what you want to do, so there's a sense of ownership.'

One approach to involving clients in the project from the outset, and gaining their commitment to the aims, was to jointly develop and agree a contract which set out the responsibilities of participants and project staff.

Project workers pointed out the importance of helping young people **work towards targets** and rewarding them for their achievements in reaching these targets. Certificates and vouchers were particularly popular. In one project, staff explained that participants preferred getting certificates and medals rather than gift vouchers, as they wanted something for the future that they could use to demonstrate their achievements:

*We give trophies and medals. We did an experiment once and gave them [fast food chain] vouchers and book vouchers, and we actually found that they would prefer a medal, something they can keep for the future.*

Many young people expressed a **dislike** for activities that involved a lot of **written work** because *'it's boring and reminds me of school'*, as one interviewee starkly put it. Instead, young people stated a clear preference for 'hands-on', **practical activities**. This was confirmed by a project worker: *'I guess what I notice is they like the interactive hands-on. The negative feedback I get is usually when everyone's been somewhere and someone's talked at them, or I've been talking at them, those types of things.'* One project that was offering young people the opportunity to do an ASDAN qualification had overcome the barrier of written work by letting participants collect evidence using videos or tape recordings. Others found that involving young people in projects that were of direct concern to them provided them with a motivation to overcome their fears and reluctance to put things in writing. One project, which provided a course for pregnant teenagers, found that: *'If there's a subject that they're interested in, then they're fine at doing the writing. For example, finding out about the birth and the labour, because that is such a mystery to them'*.

Around two-thirds of project staff, emphasised the need to **combine a clear structure** of activities **with the flexibility** to respond to individuals' needs effectively. Having structured activities was seen as important for ensuring that participants do not get bored and keep engaged. However, projects needed to remain flexible to sudden changes in young people's circumstances or needs, as explained by one interviewee: *'Some of our work is reactive. We may have had something planned but we've had to put that on hold to react to some other situation that's presented itself.'*

All project managers agreed that the success of activities depended to a large extent on them being run by **good project staff** who were able to establish good relationships with participants, respond to their needs and relate to their experiences. In this respect, a number of projects highlighted the importance of having project workers with the same backgrounds or ethnicity as the young people. As one project manager pointed out: *'We seem to have a very good track record with young black males particularly. And I think part of this is to do with the fact that [project workers] are both black as well and they are young and they can attract people in through the door'*.

Young people's experiences and views of the project staff are discussed in the next section.

## 7.3 Experiences and Views of Project Staff and Support Received

### 7.3.1 Views of project staff

The majority of the young people interviewed had positive comments to make about staff. Some participants emphasised that they particularly liked certain project workers, whilst others noted that they had good relationships with all staff.

Many of the young people referred to the project workers as being **friendly** or friends. For example, whilst one interviewee said *‘we are all mates with them’*, another pointed out that *‘the way I talk to my friends, I can talk to them’*. Participants liked this informality and the ease of access which project staff allowed.

In some instances, participants referred to project staff in a **familial** sense. For example, one project manager was described as being *‘like me mum’*, whilst another young person mentioned that *‘it’s like walking into your house and you know everybody’*. Young people appreciated this degree of familiarity and valued the feeling of being cared for.

Project staff were also described as being **fun** by many of the young people. One young woman commented: *‘She’s always laughing, she’s always cracking jokes, she even makes me laugh just thinking about her’*. Similarly, another participant observed that *‘sometimes if you’re down she makes you laugh – it’s really funny’*. Again, young people appreciated the sometimes light-hearted approach adopted by project staff and the relaxed atmosphere this created.

Project workers were described as **trustworthy and reliable** by some interviewees. For example, one participant reported that a member of staff was *‘very safe, she’s not someone who’ll backstab you’*. Another participant felt she could *‘tell them [project workers] everything’*. Being able to trust and confide in adults was very important for the young people as many of them had had negative experiences in trying to relate to teachers and parents, and felt let down by them.

Project workers were generally regarded as being **helpful and supportive**. A typical comment was that, *‘if you need him, he’s there. He’ll do what he can to help’*. This type of approach was valued by young people, especially those who felt marginalised at school because teachers did not have enough time for them.

A rare example of a participant not feeling comfortable with a project worker is outlined below:

*She started saying you should come to this. When you say no to something, she ends up asking and asking and asking. I told her on the*



*phone that I didn't want to go, then she came round to see me, and she asked me so many times. She said my friend could come...and my friend ended up saying yes, but we really didn't want to.*

**Not being pressurised** into activities and situations was highlighted by young people as an important strategy for project staff to adopt.

Project staff were described as being good at **communicating** with, and talking to, young people by many of the participants. For example, one young person commented that *'They're good at doing a lot of stuff. How to talk to young people, because I know a lot of young people don't want to talk'*. Some interviewees noted that project staff were polite and respectful. For example, whilst one young person commented that *'they don't talk down to you'*, another said that *'they never demand you do things; they'd ask you politely'*.

In some instances, the ability to communicate with young people was brought into direct comparison with young people's perceptions of their teachers, as this comment shows: *'... he's not like the teachers at school, he knows how to deal with people properly.'* Similarly, another participant commented that *'they treat you like adults and not like kids.'* The ability to get a point or message across was also emphasised as important. One young person noted that the project workers were good at:

*putting different things in different ways, showing you how to do things instead of shouting at you. They explain and they'll sit there. If they can't explain it, [project manager] will come and sort it out.*

The project workers were also described as having an **influence** on some young people's behaviour. One young woman commented that *'I think they're good at dealing with us because sometimes you do get a bit on your high horse and stuff'*. Similarly, a participant noted that *'I think we've calmed down our behaviour. Mum even says I've changed a lot since I've been here'*. Another interviewee remarked that *'I have not been getting into as much trouble with the police'*. Project staff were regarded as not only being good at exerting a calming influence on behaviour, but also as having a motivational ability. For example, one young person pointed out that the project workers were *'good at gearing you up to do something when you can't be bothered'*.

The young people referred to the project workers as being good at **listening and understanding**. For example, *'[project manager] is a good listener. It's like you can tell her anything and she won't say anything to you. She might not agree, but she'll still listen'*. Once again, comparisons with teachers were made: *'They listen to us but the teachers didn't.'* The project staff were seen as having the ability to empathise with where young people were *'coming from'*. Similarly, one young person noted *'they are brilliant; they know how you think, basically'*.

In addition, project staff were seen as being good at **providing support** when needed. For example, one participant emphasised that *'when I've been in*

*trouble at school, I can talk to them and they can talk to the school*. Similarly, another young person commented that *‘if you get into trouble you can go and see them and they’ll tell you what to do’*. Young people’s views of this support are explored in more depth below.

### **7.3.2 Views of support provided by project staff**

A small number of interviewees did not know what help the project staff had provided, whilst some emphasised that they personally had not needed any support but **knew it was available** if required. For example, one young person highlighted that *‘I don’t need help myself. One chap came up who was gay and they just talked to him about it and helped him with it’*.

The majority of young people, however, clearly described the help or support that had been provided by the project staff. **Being there** in the first instance was noted as one type of support provided by the project workers. For example, one young person commented that *‘they’ve taken their time to give you somewhere to go’*. Similarly, another participant emphasised that being told they could attend the project classified as help. The interviewee explained why being told he could join the project was so important, saying that *‘if I had carried on at school I would have got expelled, because I don’t like school’*.

Support with young people’s **learning** was another form of help identified. For example, one participant noted that, *‘I can read quite well now and my writing is much better, so I’ve improved with that’*. Another interviewee commented that *‘if I get a bit behind, I can come in and she will go through all the work again with me if I don’t get it...if I need some help, she would provide it’*.

Participants identified receiving advice and support when considering their future **careers**, such as help to find employment or continuing with education and training. For example, one interviewee remarked that *‘I did actually tell her I wanted to work in a hospital and she did tell me what I would need and where was best to go on what course level next’*. Having someone with whom to discuss their future plans was valued by some of the young people interviewed.

Some participants reported receiving support with **practical and personal problems** which was important given the characteristics of the young people presented in Chapter 5. Help with finding accommodation was appreciated, as this interviewee explained: *‘A couple of weeks ago I put in to see if I could have my own house, and everyone helped me then.’* Participants in one project emphasised that staff had provided lifts to activities, such as netball after school. One young woman highlighted how the project staff had helped her with problems at school and at home:

*She got me back into school. She talked to me and I just went back to school...I wasn’t talking to my Mum and I wasn’t living at my Mum’s or anything and she got me back in the house...I never used to get on with*

*Mum until we met [project workers] ...they helped me to sort out problems.*

The young people reported that project staff provided other forms of support related to life skills, such as financial planning, caring for children and interacting with other people.

Only a small minority of participants indicated that they needed any **additional help**, such as finding a college place or employment. In contrast, one young person said that *'I think they have done what they can for me'*, whilst another commented that *'I think that they've helped me a lot, so I don't want to ask for more'*.

The majority of young people indicated that the project workers **talked to them about how they were getting on**. Discussions took place on a variety of levels, firstly through general conversation about participants' lives and welfare. For example, an interviewee related that:

*Me and [project worker] will have a talk. I'll ask how his wife is and he'll ask how my Mum is. My brother's gone into the Navy, and he'll ask how his exams went. When we all went away on the residential, it was just like one big family.*

Project workers also appeared to be sensitive to issues in young people's lives. For example, one participant emphasised that *'when things aren't going well, [project worker] will ask me if everything's all right'*. Similarly, another young person commented *'it's better for me to say it out loud than to keep it inside me'*.

Finally, participants were asked how they were getting on with the project as a whole or certain activities. *'We have to tell him what we get out of it and what we want'* was a typical comment. As with the other instances presented in this section, young people valued being asked their opinion and the interest shown in them by project staff.

All of the young people who were asked said that they would recommend joining the NSF project in which they were involved to other young people and their friends. Clients explained that they would recommend the project because the staff were friendly and willing to listen and the environment generally was warm and welcoming. In addition, they saw involvement in the NSF project as an opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. Clients recognised the value of the NSF project in providing a useful alternative for young people who were not in school and that, through providing opportunities and activities, the NSF project could help them to learn and progress. Furthermore, the role of the NSF in providing advice and support for making decisions about their future, including finding them college and training places, was acknowledged as another reason to inform their friends about the project.

## 7.4 Lessons Learned in Providing Activities

Project staff mentioned some lessons that they had learned in delivering activities to the NSF client group. The main lessons which they highlighted are outlined below.

- ♦ Alternative approaches to learning and gathering evidence, which did not rely too much on writing, were found to be particularly effective in engaging many of those young people on projects who had low basic skills levels.
- ♦ Providing short and varied activities with regular breaks was more likely to keep engaged those young people with short attention spans and a tendency to become bored easily.
- ♦ Rewarding young people for their achievements, however small, kept them motivated and gave them the confidence to try other things. Certificates which could be used in the future, for example in order to provide evidence to employers, were found to be valued more highly by the young people than vouchers for shops.
- ♦ Developing a contract, which is signed by both project workers and participants, helped to inform young people of their responsibilities within projects and to establish a feeling of mutual respect between staff and clients.
- ♦ Providing activities that were relevant to the young people's concerns, interests and needs was found to be particularly effective in keeping them engaged.
- ♦ Involving young people in the choice, planning and improvement of activities gave them a feeling of ownership and was more likely to ensure continued engagement in the project.

## Key Findings

- ◆ NSF projects offered flexibility in the activities they provided for young people, although this was often within a structure. The activities they offered reflected the needs of a client group of young people who had been disengaged from education and learning and who needed encouragement to become involved. Provision included help with improving basic skills, activities targeted at developing life skills and personal development, opportunities for gaining work-related skills, arts, music and sport activities and trips and residential.
- ◆ To engage a group of young people who had rejected other forms of learning, NSF staff adopted alternative approaches, such as working on a one-to-one basis or in small groups on a variety of short activities with frequent breaks. Staff involved the young clients in decision making regarding the activities and respected their choices. In addition, the learning element of an activity was not always made explicit from the outset.
- ◆ The young people valued in particular the leisure and creative activities, preparing and eating food together and day trips and residential which provided them with an opportunity to move outside their normal environments. Young people's enjoyment of more formal learning activities depended on the extent to which they were disengaged from learning in the first instance. Those young people disengaged from formal learning often valued the opportunity to achieve in a new environment, whereas those who were disengaged from any form of learning preferred activities where the learning element was less explicit.
- ◆ Successful project activities were relevant to young people's interests and priorities and provided young people with a sense of ownership. Whilst having clear targets to aim for was a further feature, an emphasis on practical, rather than written, work was also important.
- ◆ The project staff were central to the success of the NSF projects. Young people particularly appreciated the fact that staff were friendly and supportive. Staff communicated well with the clients and spent time listening to them and attempting to understand their needs. Perhaps because many young clients had had negative experiences of adults, they valued working with staff whom they regarded as trustworthy and reliable. The support offered by projects included providing support with personal problems, such as accommodation issues, finding suitable educational provision and making career decisions.
- ◆ Clients said that they would recommend joining NSF projects to other young people because the projects offered a welcoming environment, gave them something useful to do, helped them to make decisions about the future, and gave them the opportunity to meet people.

## 8. OUTCOMES OF PROJECTS

### 8.1 Young People's and Project Workers' Reflections on Outcomes

Interviews with young people and project workers suggested that the process of re-engagement may take many different forms depending on the participants' starting points and the activities on offer. As a result, it is important to assess the success and outcomes of NSF projects with reference to the initial needs of the young people and the types and levels of activities that projects were able to make available to them. Thus, while for some projects getting a young person to attend project activities on a regular basis may have been seen only as the beginning of the process of re-engagement, for other projects dealing with severely disadvantaged and disengaged young people this was considered to be a major outcome and a sign of re-engagement. This need for a differential assessment of outcomes and levels of re-engagement was highlighted by one project worker:

*OK, what is progression? To look at a load of figures and say 20 out of the 60 people went on to college doesn't mean a thing. How disaffected were those 20 young people? How unlikely were they to end up at college anyway? What sorts of things did they go on to college to do? How many of them were young people who were absolutely disaffected and people all over the place have washed their hands of them? How many of them started doing something with their life instead of sitting in front of television or going smoking draw or drinking booze or getting into crime?*

The following sections examine the different forms of re-engagement that NSF projects were able to achieve: progression, achievement of qualifications, development of skills, personal development and other outcomes.

#### 8.1.1 Progression to education, training or employment

Nearly all projects reported at the very least some success in ensuring the progression of participants into education, training or employment. However, outcomes were found to differ depending on the different starting points of the young people involved. For some projects, getting participants to go back to school just for a few hours per week was seen as a major achievement. Other projects found that re-engaging participants into school was particularly successful where they were able to negotiate a flexible programme for them. One leaver, for example, had been allowed to combine work experience, working on the project as a volunteer and attending school:

*Since I left, I am back at school, but I am still having problems at school, so they just got me doing extended work experience on a building site. I*

*am doing that twice a week and I come here once a week as a project volunteer and two days a week at school.*

However, in some cases, it was found that young people's experiences on projects simply confirmed their views that they did not fit into school. Thus, many young people who had experienced, and come to appreciate, the alternative learning and teaching styles that were made available to them by projects were reluctant to return to school. As one young man expressed it:

*cause at school, most of the work you do...was just copying out on a piece of paper, but working on the allotment has given me more education for what I want to do and a little bit more variety and using a bit more imagination.*

In some cases, it was found that leavers were not yet ready to move on to mainstream learning options and they were helped to get access to other projects that suited their needs such as the Learning Gateway: *'They do tasters of all the courses there and then ideally move on to the proper course, NVQ or whatever.'*

However, about a third of projects reported a great success in managing to move young people on to various positive learning outcomes which matched their particular interests and abilities. As one project worker pointed out:

*Someone has gone on to [another local project], somebody went on to do a painting and decorating apprenticeship, another NVQ 2 Mechanics, somebody got a full-time job, but it started off as a placement in a garage. It's different for every single person – it depends on what they want to do. A lot of girls go into hairdressing, which they will do either at [college] or another training centre...where they do on-the-job training.*

Evidence of the extent to which young people were able to sustain such positive outcomes is discussed in Section 8.1.6 below.

### **8.1.2 Achievement of certificates or qualifications**

As noted in Section 7.2, many young people appreciated the possibility of achieving certificates or qualifications which would be useful to them in the future. The importance of such achievements was, for example, highlighted by one young woman: *'The best bit is that I gained my qualifications on CLAIT and IBT2: that's what makes me feel I got something out of it. In the future, that's what's going to stay with me.'*

Qualifications and certificates that participants had achieved ranged from those that were awarded by projects themselves as a way of recognising even the smallest achievements, ranging from turning up on time, to gaining health and safety and first aid certificates. Young people were also working towards, or had achieved, several nationally recognised awards, including:

- ♦ the Duke of Edinburgh Award;

- ◆ ASDAN Bronze award;
- ◆ CLAIT;
- ◆ NVQs;
- ◆ Pitman’s Basic ESOL;
- ◆ National Youth Achievement award;
- ◆ the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL); and
- ◆ the Integrated Business Technology (IBT) award.

### 8.1.3 Development of skills

Of particular importance for both project workers and young people were the effects projects had on participants’ **communication skills**. One leaver, for example, explained that working with project workers had taught him ‘*just things like eye contact, or the way they will come and talk to you or just that they might say please and thank you instead of shouting things at you*’. As indicated in Section 7.2, activities that involved a lot of writing tended to be the least popular with young people. However, several projects put a strong emphasis on developing young people’s **literacy**, helping those with very limited skills to improve their reading and writing. One project, for example, which helped young Muslim women, emphasised the benefits in terms of developing their reading, writing and general communication skills and reported positive outcomes in this respect:

*She is still a bit quiet – she is a bit reserved and she has a tendency not to say very much. But when she first came in she couldn’t understand anything. It was just little things, simple things like she couldn’t read or write. And now she is able to read and write and she can actually string a sentence together. She is much more aware of what’s going on around her, just simple things like vocabulary used in shopping and names given to items of clothing and things like that.*

In some cases, projects managed to encourage young people to see the importance of developing their literacy and having the confidence to seek help. An illustration was an interviewee who explained that:

*Before I came here, I wouldn’t be able to read a book to anyone. But I have just started taking reading lessons at school. But before, I wouldn’t even think of going up and asking for reading lessons. I would be too embarrassed to say I can’t read.*

In one case, project staff had helped to diagnose a participant as being dyslexic and had arranged support for his particular needs: ‘*We thought he couldn’t read. But we had to tread very carefully because it’s a difficult thing, and we found out now that we’ve done some tests that it’s possible that he’s dyslexic.*’

Many projects also provided young people with access to computers in order to develop their **ICT skills**. Participants said that this had helped them



become confident in using ICT facilities such as the Internet and learning to use different software packages. Further benefits included young people developing an interest in advancing their knowledge of computers and using them more proficiently. The following comment of a young man was typical: *‘I’ve become more confident using computers – spreadsheets, entering numbers and all that stuff.’*

Projects that enabled participants to go on placements and those which involved young people in real work activities often highlighted the **work-related skills** they were able to develop. One young Muslim woman who had been provided with work experience identified the following positive outcomes:

*I’ve been taking part in voluntary work and reception work. We don’t get much of an opportunity to work like from home and I’ve learnt more about the working environment, how they do the jobs, typing and office work and filing and stuff like that.*

Other participants who had been involved in project activities providing services to members of the public were able to develop valuable customer service skills. One such project identified the following outcomes:

*What we actually do with them all I feel is by running the clothes store, it gives them the confidence to work with the public. We do lots of informal training with them within the project, but we try and base it so it’s helpful if they’re going to go out for a job we do telephone technique, customer care, reception, first aid, food hygiene.*

Another project, which provided basic services to members of the public such as gardening or basic repairs, found that young people were better able to adapt to employment on leaving the project, as the project worker explained:

*Some people have said they got a job and said it was not a lot different from the jobs on the project. He says ‘You go in everyday and do what the supervisor tells you to do and you have to go and get on with it. And if you have a problem you go back to him’. He said it was like when we used to go out doing the gardens.*

#### **8.1.4 Personal development**

Many of the project workers emphasised that, even in the cases where they were not able to move young people on to education, employment or training options, young people experienced what were described as ‘soft’ outcomes which represented major achievements for those concerned. Project workers and young people across all the projects visited highlighted the impact which taking part in projects could have on participants’ **self-confidence** and feelings of **self-esteem**. One project worker explained that *‘They have found a sense of self-worth through their learning experience. They have proved things to themselves. They have proved that they can be trusted. They can say “I did that” and, as a result, they start believing in themselves’*. The difference in

one young man's behaviour as a result of such a change was noticed by school staff:

*He tells everybody how confident he is now and how good he feels about it all. If you had met him a year ago, you would not know he is the same person. He went to an interview with his year head and his year head was absolutely flabbergasted and phoned me the next day to say so. He said 'I can't believe it is the same boy. He would have sat there and not said a word or be assertive or say what he wanted to do or anything and now he can'.*

The improvements in young people's confidence also had wider beneficial outcomes, such as helping them take up other opportunities available to them and increase their **career aspirations**. This is illustrated by the comments of two leavers:

*...confidence in talking to people. Before I met [project workers], if someone said to me 'Would you like to go for an interview?', I would be like 'No, not really', because I don't know what I was going to say. But they make you realise it doesn't matter what you say, as long as you say what you mean to say.*

*The whole point of coming here is useful to me because it has helped me in lots of things and it has been very useful for me even with my career because before, I would have thought that I couldn't get a job and that I was useless. But now I have confidence where I can go into a job and do it.*

Some of the projects also identified significant improvements in participants' **behaviour** both within projects and 'out on the streets'. Some young people were said to have calmed down, which had helped them to engage in activities more effectively and, in some cases, had helped to re-engage them in school or other mainstream options. The following illustrates one such positive outcome:

*One young person when he first came here we thought...the whole place would explode because of his behaviour, but he is really tame now. When he comes here he will do English and maths and write stories. And now he is saying that he is going back to school.*

One project worker graphically likened the process of helping them to calm down with breaking in wild horses:

*It is like fetching young horses that have never been broken in, that have been running on the plain, and that is what these children are like and it is the same procedure. Softly, softly and get them to come to you. And that is really what it is. They come here and they are wild somehow and they want to calm down.*

Other changes in behaviour included **less swearing** and a **reduction in anti-social behaviour**. One leaver, who was involved in a project that provided help to old people in the community, commented on the changes in his behaviour:

*Just that you are helping people, because I was hanging around with a crowd that would take things off other people and stuff, but now I am actually helping and I feel a lot better.*

For others, just being involved in projects meant that they were not on the streets and could not get into trouble with the police. As one project worker commented: *‘If they are coming here every day, they are not on the streets causing trouble. And for some young people, one day without being in trouble is a good achievement’*.

A young man, who had attended a drug awareness course, also reported that it had **reduced his drug consumption**: *‘The most useful was the drugs awareness course because that has taken me off the streets and took me off a lot of the drugs that I used to take.’*

The development of a young person’s **life skills** was also identified as a major outcome by the majority of projects. Young people appreciated the opportunity to learn to cook and budget. This was seen as particularly an issue for older participants who lived on their own and/or had control of their own finances, as expressed by the following young man:

*I had trouble budgeting my money, because I get like 40 pounds a week and I find it hard and spend it on anything and then I go to get more money out and go ‘Oh damn – none left’. Sometimes I don’t have food for the week and that. So she has helped me budget my money correctly.*

### **8.1.5 Other outcomes**

Interviewees identified various other positive outcomes as a result of young people’s involvement in projects. These included:

- ♦ helping young people to meet new friends;
- ♦ providing some stability to their lives: *‘We seemed to be the most stable thing in her life. She’d move from foster homes to children’s homes. Us being here constantly was quite a help’*;
- ♦ providing participants with job or court references;
- ♦ improving young people’s appearance: *‘One person had a lot of difficulty with [wearing] a uniform, so we actually worked together and worked on uniform. Now sometimes I go down to the local school to do some mentoring there, and I bumped into him with a new uniform. If a teacher had said it, he would have rebelled against it, whereas we do actually build up a relationship so you can be a little bit cheeky with them with a little bit of meaning behind it’*;

- ♦ breaking down some of the barriers between young people and the community they live in.

### 8.1.6 Sustainability of outcomes

Many of the projects visited as part of this research indicated that they did not have the resources to measure the long-term sustainability of outcomes, as they were simply struggling to keep up with the day-to-day realities of running project activities. As a result, it is difficult to assess conclusively the extent to which young people, who were said to have progressed to mainstream or other learning options, had been able to sustain these outcomes. However, some projects had maintained contact with leavers and were able to provide some insights into this issue.

Some project managers pointed to what they saw as the ‘*fluidity of outcomes*’, with many young people not completing courses they had started on, dropping out of school, or losing jobs that they had put a lot of effort into getting. As one project worker explained:

*I mean a young person can progress from us and the NSF after three months, move into something and feel they are really established and you will see them four months later and they are disengaged again.*

In some cases, this was simply due to some small change in circumstances which was enough to unsettle them and disengage them from learning once again. For example, one young person had left a project and gone ‘*on to a foundation track in motor mechanics at [college] and he was doing very well even though he was very young – he was 14 and with groups of 16-year-olds. But recently that’s just broken down due to tutors changing over. He had a really good relationship with the tutor and then [the tutor] left*’.

As a consequence, about a quarter of projects pointed to the importance of maintaining contact with leavers to ensure that they try other options if they fail. One project manager provided an example of a young woman who had been helped to move on to several options:

*We had one young woman who left to go into employment with NVQ training, but didn’t get there. So I told her to come back and then we got her a job and she was at [supermarket] but she is now moving into the Learning Gateway, but whether she actually gets there I don’t know, because she says things like that but then finds it difficult.*

Another project had maintained contact with young people returning to school in order to talk through any issues with them as they arose and to help keep them engaged:

*Occasionally, some of them arrange with the school and they’ll come and have a morning with us just to keep in touch and have a talk for different reasons. We try not to cut off. We do explain it to them that it doesn’t finish here [when they leave].*

Staff in around a quarter of projects mentioned that they had several rejoiners who had not made a successful transition and who had been encouraged to return to the project for further help or advice.

It emerged from the interviews that ensuring that young people sustain their engagement in education, employment or training on leaving an NSF project presented a challenge for project staff. In order to minimise this challenge, some project staff sought to prepare young people for the transition and maintained contact with leavers. In addition, some projects remained actively involved in helping young people to succeed, including, for example, negotiating flexible provision with schools or other providers and/or welcoming young people back if they found it hard to adapt to their transition.

## 8.2 Monitoring and Evaluation: Approaches and Challenges

### 8.2.1 Approaches

NSF projects are required to complete monthly monitoring forms and evaluation reports for their Managing Agents with whom they attend review and support meetings. The case-study interviews investigated what other monitoring and evaluation they carried out.

The interviews revealed that, collectively, projects made provision for monitoring and evaluating the following three aspects: the project as a whole; individual activities and sessions; and the progress of individual participants. In practice, these processes were interrelated and, whatever approaches and systems were used, staff emphasised the importance of getting regular feedback informally through an ongoing dialogue with the young people.

The findings on **project-level approaches** indicated that most projects had staff meetings, usually on a weekly or fortnightly basis, where the work of the project, including difficulties experienced and progress towards targets, was discussed. Other methods included using weekly planners to set objectives and check whether they had been met. A project which ran a group induction reported that staff carried out a post-induction evaluation in order to decide what, if anything, should be changed in the forthcoming delivery of the project in order to meet the needs of the young people.

The most common approach used for evaluating **activities and sessions** involved project workers filling in observation sheets at the end of activities/sessions to record the work undertaken, how well the activity/session went, and points for the future. Often feedback was gained from participants informally, and occasionally through completion of short questionnaires, on their views of activities or sessions. In a few cases, photography or video was used to record work in progress and participants' achievements.

As regards **individual-level approaches**, in a third of projects, staff said that they kept records on each participant which were used to track progress.

These included any initial assessments made, progress made, and destinations on leaving. One project worker mentioned that she undertook an assessment of risk (e.g. of drug misuse or criminal activity) when young people joined. Referral forms also provided information which was used for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Projects reported that individuals' records were updated daily or weekly with written notes and observations on their behaviour, activities or achievements. For example, one manager commented that '*we have recording sheets where we just write down anything we've noticed, something like so and so was a bit touchy today...*' Elsewhere, a project worker explained that '*we have something called a running record which is kept, as well, of the conversations we have and the outcomes of the conversation*'. Reports of meetings with and/or about particular participants were also written and kept on file. Some staff said that non-attendance was monitored carefully and followed up by telephone.

Surveys were another evaluation tool used by some projects. Participants were asked to complete brief questionnaires on the project as a whole and how, if at all, they thought they had changed.

A small number of interviewees commented that they used participants' action plans to help them assess how the young people were doing. One project worker used reading and writing checklists to check on learning gains.

Another approach was to evaluate and review the progress of individual young people in collaboration with other organisations. For example, one project manager remarked that:

*We don't put the one thing in isolation; we feel that it's very important that we tap into a whole host of people who are working alongside that young person. If you've got your educational and social workers, the parents, for example, the school teacher or Learning Mentors, we use all those professionals and we work together as a team to try and look at that person's needs.*

### **8.2.2 Challenges**

Projects identified three main challenges in monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and impact of NSF. These were related to the collection of 'hard' baseline data, the measurement of 'soft' outcomes, and ascertaining longer-term impacts. Each challenge is examined below.

Project staff noted the difficulties in attempting to collect baseline data on young people which could be used in the evaluation process. They emphasised that such an approach was not appropriate for their client groups as the process would deter young people from joining or would certainly result in drop-out. The reason for this was based on the knowledge that the type of formal assessment required to yield 'hard' baseline data would remind them of school and be a major turn-off. Project staff said that taking this approach

would create a barrier to the involvement of the very people they were trying to reach and re-engage. Instead, they used more informal and less intrusive ways of assessing young people's development needs.

As indicated in Section 7.1, staff stressed that some of the significant gains made by participants in the projects were 'soft' outcomes such as increased self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation and the ability to relate to and work constructively with others. They pointed out that such outcomes, sometimes referred to as the distance travelled by young people, were notoriously difficult to measure with precision or rigour. They observed that it was difficult to provide 'hard' evidence of the impact that they were having on participants. The issue was brought into sharp relief by this project manager:

*...I think that there is not enough emphasis placed on the distance travelled with a young person – for some young people, the lack of self-esteem and confidence. They can sit with you for six months without taking their coat off. And then after six months, they come in and unzip their coat and take their coat off and I think it is a big achievement...so really, the distance travelled is difficult to quantify.*

In response to this challenge, it is worth noting that the three Managing Agents are working towards developing methods for assessing the distance travelled by young people which could be adopted by projects.

Finding out about the longer-term impacts of the projects on young people was the third evaluation challenge mentioned by some projects. Staff suggested that some of the gains made by participants in personal and social development would not be fully realised until they had left the project. The essence of this issue was captured by this project manager's comment: *'What we do, in my experience as a youth worker, you don't see the outcomes until years later, the true outcomes, the effective outcomes in terms of that individual.'* Project managers explained that they did not have the resources to track leavers and gain feedback from other organisations and agencies on how the young people were doing and developing.

Finally, it should be noted that Managing Agents indicated their awareness of these evaluation issues. They were working with projects to explore ways of dealing with the challenges facing staff in evaluating the impact and outcomes of their work.

### Key Findings

- ◆ When assessing the outcomes for young people involved in an NSF project, it is important to consider the starting point for each young person, taking into account their past experiences and needs.
- ◆ In re-engaging young people successfully into mainstream education, employment or training, project staff noted the importance of matching provision to their interest and abilities and in some cases negotiating a flexible programme, which combined elements they enjoyed with other, less popular aspects.
- ◆ While young people on some projects worked towards nationally recognised qualifications such as ASDAN, NVQs or the National Youth Achievement Award, project staff also made use of certificates which recognised smaller achievements to motivate and encourage their clients.
- ◆ Projects reported success in developing the skills of their clients. Such skills, which reflected the focus of the activities, included communication and social skills, literacy, ICT and work-related skills.
- ◆ Improvements in personal development, which underpins an individual's ability to make successful transitions, was a key outcome for many young people involved in NSF. Staff reported that clients had gained self-confidence and self-esteem and had improved their behaviour. In addition, NSF projects had contributed to the young people's ability to progress by providing opportunities and support to enhance their career aspirations and improve their life skills.
- ◆ In order to ensure positive outcomes from NSF projects were sustained, some project staff highlighted the need to maintain contact with the young person once they had left the programme and find them alternative options, if they chose not to continue with their initial destination. Staff drew attention to the impact that a small change in circumstances could have on a young person's decision not to continue with their education, employment or training.
- ◆ In addition to providing data to their Managing Agents, projects undertook internal monitoring, evaluation and review. Projects were reviewed by staff on a regular basis and some took into consideration the views of the young people when reviewing their work. Attempting to assess the progress, or distance travelled, by participants during their time on the projects was a key challenge for project staff.





## 9. REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE

### 9.1 Sharing Practice

The projects generally shared their experiences and good practice with staff from other NSF projects. Talking to staff from other NSF projects provided a chance for people to share experiences and realise they were not working in isolation as this interviewee explained: *‘I find it great to listen to people who have gone through the experience and are dealing with it just as badly. It is very good.’* Contact with fellow projects provided the opportunity to discuss some of the difficulties of working with young people and provide peer support. For example, one project worker commented that *‘the ideas we generated between us – some of the difficulties we were having – somebody would say: “Have you thought about doing this?”’*. Furthermore, as one project manager emphasised, sharing practice avoided duplicating ideas:

*There is no point reinventing the wheel but if we can learn from what each other is doing irrespective of whether the services that we offer are different, the principles to running those services are exactly the same.*

One of the project workers noted how she had worked with another NSF project to deliver outdoor activities. Unfortunately, this had not proved as successful as she had hoped:

*[colleague] and I were two workers who’d met at a training event, got on and thought we could do some outdoor activities together. As a group of workers we all got on very well; the problem was that our groups of young people didn’t gel.*

The sharing of facilities and expertise was also noted:

*There is a NSF project...which is literally a stone’s throw and that is all based on ICT. Although we have got a computer here, we are not ICT experts. So when someone has a real interest in ICT, we will take them off down there for a session. Vice versa we will have people from other projects saying ‘We can’t handle what this person wants. Can you do some individual work with them or whatever?’.*

Some project staff noted that lack of time constrained the sharing of practice with other NSF projects. A few interviewees said that they gained more from sharing practice with projects outside NSF which had similar aims or which used similar accreditation.

## 9.2 Supporting Practice

Project staff were asked to give their views on the support provided by Managing Agents. On the whole they were satisfied with the support offered, and none indicated that they required any further help. In one case, the project manager was disappointed that the Managing Agent's representative, who had been very supportive, had left his post. Project staff appreciated the level of access that they had to the Managing Agents and valued their practical advice and guidance.

The umbrella organisations were generally the first point of contact for those projects managed by CDF, as one project manager outlined:

*What they mean to us is someone local that I can ring and say 'Do you know the answer to this?' and get a quick answer, or if it is something that needs a bit of finding out, they will do that for you rather than you getting tied up on the phone. So that is very helpful.*

The support required by projects centred on project administration, such as filling in monitoring forms, and the financial aspect of managing a project. For example, one interviewee explained that:

*If I have a query on budget or how we go about something or perhaps I have overestimated something or underestimated something and I need some help and to do something about that, then I can usually get through to someone immediately who knows what they are talking about.*

Project staff said that the Managing Agents provided them with useful information. In some cases, this took the form of keeping projects up to date with policy developments, as this interviewee observed: *'He's always good if I want information: he keeps me abreast of what's coming up within government.'* In other cases, information on guidelines was provided as this manager noted: *'In terms of support, new guidelines; for example, there have been some new ones come out about residential. We are always fully informed of those.'* Significantly, one interviewee reflected that being provided with information made him *'feel that you're part of something bigger...it's given a national perspective'*.

Overall, project staff considered that the support provided by Managing Agents helped them to run their projects and deal with difficulties when they arose. They valued having someone they could call to talk through operational issues. In many cases, this enabled them to reflect more critically on their approaches and practice.

## 9.3 Key Considerations and Learning Points

This section presents key considerations and learning points in running NSF projects, as identified by the project staff interviewed in the case studies.

Notwithstanding the diversity of projects, staff did provide general advice about developing and delivering NSF projects. Reflections upon good practice centred primarily on two issues:

- ♦ the setting up, staffing and administration of the project;
- ♦ the approach adopted when working with young people.

Each of these is examined below.

### 9.3.1 Setting up, staffing and administration

Adopting a **neighbourhood approach** when developing an NSF project was particularly highlighted as important by a small number of the project staff. For example, one project manager strongly emphasised the importance of having local community involvement:

*You can bring all the agencies you want but they don't know the young people or the approach. They haven't got a leg to stand on basically – the young people don't trust them, they have been abandoned and nobody wants to work with them. We have stood up and we have criticised all these service providers for abandoning these young people.*

Being **clear about the target group** was another key consideration identified. The advice given by one interviewee was as follows: *'I think what you've got to do first of all is do your groundwork first, find out where the need is and then target the kinds of people you want to work with.'* Another stressed the importance of developing original projects:

*One of the key points if you are starting off a project on NSF is to bear in mind the nature of the client group you are trying to reach: the fact that a) they probably don't want to be found;. b) they have tried everything and they have done everything and been everywhere and nothing works for them. So really you have got to keep it in mind that you have got to make your project individual to anything else. Try not to duplicate anything locally because they have usually tried everything else locally and if they come to your project and find out it is similar to life skills or similar to another project, they are probably not going to stop with you.*

Having appropriate **funding** was also emphasised as a key consideration when setting up an NSF project, in order to offer sufficiently attractive activities to young people. The following comment reflects the experience of several projects: *'A lot of the things that the kids want to do unfortunately do entail a lot of cost.'* Some managers said that it was important not to mislead young people into thinking that activities would be available whatever the cost. A related funding consideration concerned the recruitment of staff with the necessary experience and expertise. This point was acknowledged by several managers, including the interviewee who stated that: *'You need fairly skilled workers, so you need to be able to pay the going rate to get the skilled workers. You need a decent amount of money'*.

Project staff drew attention to the importance of having **policies and procedures**, for example, to comply with health and safety guidelines and to meet all the legal obligations for working with young people. They emphasised that it was also important to keep abreast of any changes in regulations and requirements.

### 9.3.2 Approach to working with young people

**Consulting** with young people was emphasised as central to the development and delivery of NSF projects. The rationale for this was articulated by one project manager who said that *'you are not hitting and missing but what you are providing is because you have done your consultation and you have researched and consulted with young people'*. Talking to young people, listening to their needs and then providing support as identified by young people were seen as a critical approach.

Integral to this consultative approach to working with young people was the need for **flexibility**. As one project worker commented:

*This project is a lot more user friendly – certainly what the young people are requesting – and it is not so hidebound by rules and it's about flexibility, and that approach is what young people want. They want something that is quick, that is instant.*

However, project staff indicated that a balance had to be achieved between flexibility and **structure** when working with young people. Reflecting on this, a manager observed: *'Structure, I think that's important to people...we are very flexible and responsive, but not too flexible. You have got to have some structure there...and young people respond to that'*.

Project workers considered that it was important to give young people as much **ownership** of the project as possible. For example, one interviewee advocated that projects should not *'impose anything on young people. Let them develop it. Let them develop it from the very beginning'*. Another project worker made the following recommendation:

*Give the young person or any young person you are working with the opportunity to recognise the environment that you manage or work within is such it doesn't belong to you. You are facilitating the opening and closing of that building, and the base itself belongs to the community.*

**Building relationships** with young people was another key consideration in running projects. Not being confrontational was noted by one project manager as central to building relations, whilst another highlighted the importance of taking a supportive approach at the outset:

*It is a case of fetch them and make them feel comfortable and warm and a pleasant environment and don't put them under pressure for the first few*

*visits, because as soon as the pressure starts often you don't see them again. Make them feel more like a friend.*

**Consistency** in terms of how project staff approach their relationships with young people was also seen as important. A clear rationale for this was provided by this interviewee's observation:

*A lot of the problem at school is that so many different people treat them differently and they can't get it into their head how to behave with any one person....so we try and be very consistent.*

Project staff identified **respecting** and **showing an interest** in young people, along with adopting an open-minded approach, as further considerations. The learning points were well made by this interviewee: *'I think what I have seen here is you have got to respect them. From what I have seen and I find shocking is the lack of respect that young people get from other people.'*

The final key consideration in running an NSF project identified by many staff was **not to sit in judgement** on young people. This was clearly articulated by this project manager:

*I would say approach everyone with an open mind. I would say that is the main thing because you can't judge a book by its cover and also it doesn't matter what problems they may have had in the past, it doesn't mean they will present them at this particular time.*

## 9.4 Future Developments and Sustainability

The evaluation found a high level of commitment in the case-study projects to continuing to work with, and provide for, disengaged young people. Project staff noted that the service which they offered was an important resource both for young people and the local community when the social and economic costs of social exclusion were considered. They did not see take-up of, and therefore the need for, their projects diminishing in the near future given the difficulties that some young people face in making critical transitions in their teenage years and their dissatisfaction with other forms of learning. Some managers were interested in developing the capacity of their projects to provide opportunities for more clients and/or to provide a greater range of activities. In other cases, project managers were considering involving more community members, for example bringing in volunteers as mentors.

The projects identified three main requirements for sustaining this type of provision for young people in the future: funding, staffing, and developing links. The greatest emphasis was put on funding. Project staff stressed that the type of the work that they undertook with young people, where they had to deal with their often considerable personal problems as well as learning needs, was very labour intensive. They argued that resources would be required to

fund staff to continue with their work in re-engaging young people. The point was made cogently by this project manager:

*I think the funding is the most revolutionary part of the NSF. The funding is there and you use the funding to identify and deliver the needs of young people, and I think that needs to carry on in that way.*

Staffing was also regarded as a major requirement for sustainability. Project managers noted the importance of recruiting and retaining good-quality staff who had the right mix of skills needed for dealing with a very demanding client group. They were mindful that the market for these skills was increasingly competitive, particularly now that Connexions was becoming more established. Some project managers also identified the importance of building the capacity of their projects through training to diversify staff skills and help them to develop innovative ways of meeting the changing needs of young people.

The third requirement for sustainability was the development of links with local agencies and organisations. Whilst some projects had begun to establish links, it was suggested that these could be developed further and strengthened to enable projects to draw more substantially on the resources in the local community and to secure their client base. The aim of this project manager illustrates this point:

*I want to develop a localised link with a number of schools...I think this is more important because as we develop our role within the borough, there is a fear that we are only going to be working with those that have passed through the system itself. And in terms of developing our work, I would like to plug those who have just been identified as being at risk.*

A final observation made by some project staff was that they should continue to have confidence in the work that they were doing and in the approaches they were taking to re-engage young people.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 10.1 Main Findings

The report concludes by summarising the main findings presented in Part 1 and Part 2 of the research and drawing out the implications for the future development of the NSF.

The research found that the aggregated characteristics of NSF clients as reported in Part 1 of the report were reflected in the backgrounds of the young people participating in the case-study projects reported in Part 2. Clients experience multiple disadvantage which often includes exclusion or absence from school and low levels of educational achievement in addition to behavioural problems.

A total of 22,350 young people joined NSF projects since recruitment started in February 2000. Between January and December 2001, the figure of young people registered as having joined was 13,538. This figure indicates a growing momentum of young people participating in the NSF, approaching the annual target figure of 15,000.

The report has shown that at both the macro and micro levels, the NSF is recruiting clients from the target group of hard-to-reach, disengaged young people. It can be concluded from the research that a quick-fix solution is not appropriate for providing the support these young people require. The database review indicated that clients were more likely to move on to education, training or employment if they spent more than one month on projects. Furthermore, clients who could be said to be in the hardest-to-reach group, such as those who were homeless or in care, tended to spend shorter periods of time on projects. The case studies revealed that project workers needed time to gain the young people's trust, develop a working relationship with them and assess their needs and provide suitable activities.

These findings suggest that intensive support provided in the initial stages of young people's involvement in projects, which sustains them beyond the first month, is likely to lead to positive outcomes. As the hardest-to-reach group is more vulnerable to dropping out during the first month, particular care needs to be taken to provide a service that appeals to them and encourages their continued involvement with projects in the context of their unstable lives.

Other findings are presented below and referenced to the objectives of the research.



**Objective 1: To investigate how the NSF is being received by young people, and identify the critical factors which determine and affect their participation and outcomes**

The evidence presented in this evaluation indicates that the NSF projects were well regarded by the young people who participated in the research. They appreciated the styles of delivery adopted by the projects, and valued the qualities and support of project staff. Furthermore, they enjoyed and responded positively to most of the activities provided. They felt that they were benefiting from their experiences on projects. Nearly all said that they would recommend joining their project to other young people. They had few suggestions for improving NSF; in the main they thought that the provision offered should remain unchanged.

The critical factors which determined and affected young people's participation and outcomes were as follows:

- ◆ the provision of friendly, secure and responsive environments where clients felt safe and supported;
- ◆ the experience and expertise of project workers who took time to understand the needs and gain the trust of clients who were often apprehensive and lacking in self-esteem and self-confidence;
- ◆ the organisation of projects based on consultation with clients which gave them a sense of ownership and offered them a degree of choice;
- ◆ the careful design of programmes which engaged young people, who had not been motivated by more formal learning opportunities in the past, through giving them access to practical, creative and leisure activities that were unlike school;
- ◆ the flexible delivery of activities, including working with clients in small groups and on a one-to-one basis.

**Objective 2: To ascertain and examine project workers' perceptions of the NSF**

The evidence gathered from the case studies revealed that projects were positive about NSF for four main reasons.

- ◆ NSF had raised the profile of working with disaffected and disengaged young people. Project staff also felt more secure and less isolated being part of a large network which was dealing with the challenges of re-engaging young people.
- ◆ NSF gave them resources to help fill a gap in provision for disaffected and disengaged young people. They also valued the way that NSF funding was targeted directly at projects at the local level.
- ◆ They valued the infrastructure of support provided by the Managing Agents. As a result, they had access to advice and guidance and did not

feel isolated. The support infrastructure also gave them opportunities for discussing and sharing practice which many found useful.

- ◆ They appreciated the way that NSF allowed them to work flexibly within its overall aims. Consequently, they did not feel constrained or inhibited, and responded positively to the confidence shown in their approaches to re-engaging young people.

The research found that some project workers could have accessed more of the support and training provided if they had had more time available. This was not possible owing to the considerable workload of running projects with few staff.

Project staff were committed to continuing their work with young people and identified three main requirements for sustaining their projects in the long term. These were continued funding, the retention of skilled staff, and the development of stronger links with local agencies and organisations. Whilst some already had links with schools, Connexions and other local services, they thought that these could be developed further to improve the referral process and secure their client base.

### **Objective 3: To establish the benefits of the programme for the young people who participate**

The analysis of the NSF database revealed that around half (51 per cent) of the young people who had left projects moved on to positive outcomes, including education, training, employment, the Learning Gateway, New Deal, and voluntary work. The case studies revealed that young people also benefited in terms of gaining certificates and qualifications, developing skills for example in ICT and communication, and personal development. Project staff noted that personal development was the main benefit gained by many participants whose increased self-esteem and self-confidence enabled them to deal with personal problems and start to progress. The research found that ways of measuring these ‘soft’ outcomes were not fully developed. Finding and developing suitable methodologies and tools were proving a challenge for projects and their Managing Agents.

### **Objective 4: To identify the lessons learned from projects’ experience that can inform the development of good practice in achieving the objectives of the programme for young people**

The research drew out several lessons learned by NSF projects which are relevant to the development of good practice in working with disengaged young people. Project staff identified strategies for engaging young people and for providing activities to meet their needs. The former included taking a personal, mediated approach when liaising with referral agencies, offering young people the opportunity to sample projects on a ‘taster’ basis, and taking an informal, ongoing and discursive approach to assessing young people’s needs. Providing short and varied activities with regular breaks, rewarding young people for their achievements however small, and involving them in the

choice, planning and improvement of activities were some of the lessons learned by projects in attempting to re-engage young people. Project staff emphasised the importance of showing respect to young people and being non-judgemental.

**Objective 5: To evaluate how far NSF activities are integrated with Connexions and other central and local government initiatives**

The research found that whilst the NSF case-study projects had developed, or were in the process of developing, links with local providers and services, such as Youth Offending Teams, Connexions Services and schools, this had sometimes generated tensions resulting in a lack of cooperation. Where this occurred, NSF project staff were working hard to overcome barriers and gain the confidence of other local providers and services. The emerging view from all of the case studies was that links could be developed further to improve the referral process and ensure that hard-to-reach young people had access to the provision they needed.

The research evidence suggests that, although NSF projects have initiated working relationships with local agencies and services to varying degrees, they are not yet integrated with them. This would involve developing a partnership approach with common strategies and practices for assessing and meeting the needs of disengaged young people.

## **10.2 Implications for Policy and Practice**

The evaluation found that there is a group of young people whose needs are not being fully met by mainstream education and training providers and consequently there is a clear demand for the services provided by NSF projects. Several of the case-study projects were operating at full capacity and were reluctant to promote themselves further and create a demand they could not meet. The implication of this is that there should be sustained funding for NSF projects and that serious consideration should be given to expanding this provision.

There was some uncertainty among project staff as regards continuation of funding after the initial three years. As a result, project managers were concerned about retaining experienced and committed staff, particularly taking into consideration the opportunities available to people with these skills. The implication of this is that if the experience and expertise of staff working in NSF projects are not to be lost, then a clear commitment to future funding needs to be communicated.

Whilst projects were aware of the new role of the Connexions Service, and some had established links at the local level, effective working relationships were still in the process of being developed. Meeting the complex needs of disengaged young people requires a more integrated approach by Connexions and NSF projects so that the client group benefit from the combined

experience and expertise of Personal Advisers and NSF project workers. There is also a need to examine the strategies used by different NSF projects to link with Connexions in order to identify and disseminate good practice.

An important implication of the research findings concerns the recognition and evaluation of ‘soft’ outcomes from NSF projects such as improvements in young people’s self-esteem and self-confidence. Such outcomes are especially difficult to measure reliably but are significant in that they can form the basis for young people developing skills and making a successful transition to further learning and employment. It is important that NSF projects are not undervalued because of the methodological challenges involved in quantifying impact on personal development. Consequently, it is in the interests of the NSF and the target group of disengaged young people that the three Managing Agents and projects do justice to the full range of outcomes by sharing thinking, innovation and practice on measuring ‘soft’ outcomes. NSF would be strengthened by identifying and disseminating innovative and effective practice in addressing this issue.

Finally, it should be noted that in considering the future development and sustainability of the NSF, efforts should be made to retain the individually focused and flexible, community-based approach which provides an alternative opportunity for development and a route into learning or employment for some young people.



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# APPENDIX

This appendix provides a comprehensive list of the categories contained in the NSF database.

## **Target Audience** (projects can identify **one or more** target audiences)

- Those who have been excluded from school
- Long-term non-attenders/truants
- In and/or leaving care
- Teenage parents/young mums/potential young parents
- Young offenders/ex-offenders/ex-prisoners/at risk
- Young people with special educational needs
- Mental health issues
- Young people with low levels of school achievement
- Young people with alcohol/drug dependency problems
- Young people from particular ethnic groups
- Homeless young people
- Disabled young people
- Young carers
- Refugee/asylum seekers
- Travellers
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual young people
- Disaffected/disengaged/socially excluded
- Other

## **Recruitment methods** (projects have to identify **one** method of recruitment for each client)

- Project Worker
- Project Volunteer
- Peer (Past/Present Project Volunteer)
- Project Publicity
- Youth Worker
- Educational Welfare Officer
- Learning Mentor
- Teacher/School
- Educational Psychologist
- Probation Worker
- Police
- Social Worker
- Youth Offending Team
- Personal Advisor
- Careers Service
- Family/Neighbour/Friend
- Self-referral/Walk-by/Chance Encounter
- Voluntary Sector
- Private Sector
- Other

**Client characteristics** (projects can identify **one or more** characteristics of clients from the following list)

- Excluded from school
- Long term non-attender/truant
- In and/or leaving care
- Teenage parent/young mum/potential young parent
- Young offenders/ex-offenders/ex-prisoners/at risk
- Special educational needs
- Mental health issues
- Low levels of school achievement
- Alcohol/drug dependency problems
- Homeless
- Disabled
- Young carer
- Refugee/asylum seeker
- Traveller
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual

**Destinations** (projects have to identify **one** from the following list of destinations for each leaver)

- Local Programmes – Learning Gateway
- Local Programmes – New Start
- Local Programmes – New Deal
- Local Programmes – Connexions Service
- Local Programmes – Other Programme
- Full-time Education
- Part-time Education
- Modern Apprenticeship
- National Traineeship (employed status)
- National Traineeship (non-employed status)
- Other Training
- Employment with training leading to NVQ2 or equivalent
- Employment with training not leading to NVQ2
- Employment with no training
- Voluntary Work
- Entered a custodial sentence
- Left the area
- Moved to an unknown destination
- To support a family
- Have indicated they no longer want to be assisted
- Left for health reasons
- Pregnancy
- Ceased to be eligible for support under the NSF
- Deceased
- Cannot be contacted/Unknown

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**Project activities** (projects are able to specify **one or more** of the following types of activities)

Advice/Information/Counselling  
ICT  
Music/Recording/TV/Video  
Arts/Crafts/Dance/Drama  
Motor-based  
Individualised Learning Programme  
Recreational/Outdoor Pursuits/Sport/Residential  
Job related skills development  
Community Health/Sex Education/Drugs Education  
Environment Education  
Volunteering and Voluntary Action  
Issue-based Curriculum  
Other